Smethwick Partnership Board Engagement and Funding Subgroup Meeting Notes

Meeting details	1 October 2026
Attendees	W Ali (Chair), G Josan, M Sibi, C Padda, J Watkins
Apologies received	A Taylor, J Thompson, K Patel, R Lake and Z Hussain,
Support officers	A Fuidge, E Parkes, L Firth and R Rahim

1. Welcome and apologies

1.1. W Ali welcomed all to the meeting and informed members he would chair the meeting in Z Hussain's absence. Apologies received were reported to members present.

2. Declarations of interest raised

2.1. C Padda – Declared attendance as a representative of the Guru Nanak Gurdwara, as per the appointment to the Board.

2.2. C Padda – Declared interest with regards to the Expression of Interest submission from the Guru Nanak Gurdwara. C Padda was instructed not to contribute to any discussion relating to this application.

2.3. Z Hussain – Declared interest with regards to the Expression if Interest submission from the Abrahamic Foundation. Z Hussain declared interest prior to the meeting and sent apologies to this meeting.

3. Expression of Interests received

3.1. The Neighbourhood Development Officer provided members with an update on the Expressions of Interest (EOIs) received by the closing date of 25 September 2026. A total of 19 EOIs had been submitted and an overview of financial requests was provided, noting that the EOIs requested circa £183,000 revenue funding and £164,000 capital funding.

3.2. An update was also provided on the status of full applications already received. These totalled circa £207,000 in revenue funding and £172,000 in capital funding. This is subject to change when finalising the full application form as funding may be capitalised or changed to revenue when details of costs are provided.

3.3. To date, £14,740 revenue funding and £25,000 capital funding had been approved - two projects had been approved at the last Subgroup meeting on 3 September. As reported to the Smethwick Partnership Board at its meeting on 11 September, between the period of publishing the Board papers and the Board meeting, the Subgroup approved another project application. This delay was due to a document being omitted from the scoring panel pack.

3.4. An overview of the EOIs was presented, including the primary themes represented across both EOIs and full applications:

- Food Provision – 3 applications
- Community Cohesion – 2 applications
- Sports and Arts – 8 applications
- Health and Wellbeing – 5 applications
- Regeneration – 14 applications
- Education and Business – 6 applications
- Community Power – 1 application

3.5. The chair asked members to declare any conflicts of interest prior to discussing EOI's. No further declarations were made.

3.6. A Board member raised an observation that some smaller community groups may find the application process more challenging than larger or more established organisations. Members acknowledged that the current funding process was developed and approved by the Board and agreed that there will be an opportunity to review the process for future funding rounds.

3.7. It was discussed that a targeted approach could be considered in the future to encourage greater participation from smaller organisations. Suggestions included establishing a dedicated funding pot for smaller groups, simplifying application requirements and exploring alternative application formats where appropriate.

3.8. Members also discussed opportunities to encourage collaboration between larger and smaller organisations. It was suggested that future funding rounds could place greater emphasis on partnership working and require larger projects to demonstrate how they will engage and support smaller community organisations.

3.9. The Board recognised that these considerations should inform future programme design but agreed that the current discussion should focus on decision-making within the existing process.

3.10. The Board received an overview of each EOI submitted, including a summary of the project proposal, funding ask, delivery lead and partnership working arrangements.

3.11. **Agreed: All 19 Expressions of Interest will proceed to the full application stage.**

4. Full Application process recap and prioritisation approach

4.1. It was noted that the current assessment process includes a minimum threshold score of 60%, with applications meeting this threshold being eligible for funding. However, given the level of oversubscription, the Smethwick Partnership Board recognised the need for a prioritisation methodology should available funding be insufficient to support all eligible applications

4.2. Members were referred to the agenda pack, which included proposed sifting steps put together by the PMO as directed by the Subgroup at its previous meeting.

4.3. Members discussed the importance of partnership working and collaboration when assessing applications. Members also discussed the potential consideration of match funding, however agreed that because this was not mandatory requirement, this element would not be used as a sifting criterion. They also reflected on the value of supporting pilot projects which could potentially be scaled up in future funding rounds if successful.

4.4. Discussion highlighted the challenge of evidencing meaningful partnership working, as many applications referenced collaboration but provided varying levels of detail regarding how partnerships would operate in practice. Members agreed that providing evidence of partnership working is encouraged, for example a letter of support.

4.5. Members agreed that previous assessment rounds provided a useful benchmark and considered aligning future prioritisation thresholds with scoring achieved during earlier funding decisions. It was agreed that the increased threshold during the last sifting stage would be 65%.

4.6. The importance of managing applicant expectations was emphasised. Members agreed that applicants invited to the next stage should be clearly informed that the funding programme is oversubscribed and that progression to a full application does not guarantee funding. The NDO confirmed they are reiterating this message to applicants. The PMO agreed to include this message in EOI outcome correspondence.

4.7. Members also discussed opportunities to encourage applicants to work together where appropriate. It was suggested that organisations with similar proposals could potentially strengthen their applications through collaboration and joint delivery approaches, helping to maximise impact and reduce duplication across the programme.

4.8. Members were asked to agree the sifting criterion discussed. All present members agreed the sifting process.

4.9. **Agreed: Sifting process for the £500 - £25,000 funding programme as outlined below.**

4.9.1. **Sift 1 – Minimum pass threshold -** Only applications that achieve the agreed minimum assessment threshold of 60% will be considered for funding. Applications that score below 60% will not be recommended for funding. As part of the established process, applicants will receive feedback from the scoring panel and Board and will be able to reapply in future funding rounds where appropriate.

4.9.2. **Sift 2 – Strategic fit and evidence of need -** If the programme remains oversubscribed following Sift 1, priority will be given to projects that achieve a minimum score of 2 in each of the following criteria:

- Adds value, does not duplicate or displace existing provision and benefits communities in Smethwick; and
- Evidence of need/ consultation.

4.9.3. **Sift 3 – Priority investment themes -** If the programme remains oversubscribed following Sift 2, only applications aligned to one or more of the programme's top five priority investment themes will be considered.

4.9.4. This approach aligns with the 10-Year Regeneration Plan and the 4-Year Investment Plan. While the Board previously agreed to accept applications across all nine investment themes, it also agreed that priority should be given to the five themes identified through community engagement and consultation undertaken in 2025.

4.9.5. **Sift 4 – Value for Money -** If applications continue to be oversubscribed following Sift 3, the Subgroup will apply a further sift to assess the Value for Money. Priority will be given to projects that achieve a minimum score of 2.

4.9.6. **Sift 5 – Match Funding -** If applications continue to be oversubscribed following Sift 4, the Subgroup will apply a further sift to assess Match Funding contribution. Priority will be given to projects that achieve a minimum score of 2, or where match funding is not required for the project.

4.9.7. If, following the above sift stages the programme remains oversubscribed, the Subgroup will apply a further sift to assess the Value for Money. Priority will be given to projects that achieve a minimum score of 2.

4.9.8. **Sift 6 – Increased quality threshold -** If applications continue to be oversubscribed following Sift 3, the Subgroup may recommend increasing the overall funding threshold from 60% to 65% to ensure that only the highest quality projects are funded.

4.9.9. The suggested threshold of 65% reflects the lowest scoring application approved for funding during Round 1 of the programme. This provides a reasonable and evidence-based benchmark should the Board need to further prioritise applications due to oversubscription.

4.9.10. If, following any stage of the prioritisation process, the total value of eligible applications falls within the available budget, the Subgroup may recommend funding awards in rank order of assessment score until the available funding has been fully committed.

5. Subgroup Terms of Reference

5.1. Members reviewed the draft Terms of Reference and were informed that the Chair of the Board (A Taylor), requested no voting restrictions to allow all Board members to attend Subgroup meetings and take part in decision making.

5.2. Members agreed the draft Terms of Reference for presenting to the Partnership Board for agreement.

5.3. **Agreed: The Smethwick Partnership Board Engagement and Funding Subgroup Terms of Reference, and to present the document to the Smethwick Partnership Board for agreement.**

6. Workshop Planning

6.1. Members discussed arrangements for the strategic planning workshop scheduled for December. J Watkins provided initial thoughts on what the workshop should focus on via email. The PMO then prepared a draft agenda for Subgroup input.

6.2. Members acknowledged the next scheduled Subgroup meeting would focus on full application assessments and funding decisions, therefore discussed opportunities to continue workshop planning outside formal meetings i.e. data collection.

6.3. The proposed workshop structure was reviewed. Members agreed that the success of the event would depend on Board members completing preparatory work in advance and sharing relevant information with officers before the workshop takes place.

6.4. Members welcomed the proposed agenda but noted that the workshop should be designed to ensure discussions ultimately lead to clear priorities and

delivery plans. It was suggested that some workshop sessions that focus on gathering evidence and intelligence is completed prior to the workshop.

6.5. Clarification was provided that this information would be collated and shared prior to 11 December for members to review.

6.6. There was support for a phased approach, with the workshop generating priorities and project concepts, followed by additional work to refine these ideas into deliverable projects and strategic plans by Board members and key partners.

6.7. Members also highlighted the importance of project planning methodologies, including clear milestones, timelines, evidence requirements and delivery gateways.

6.8. Discussion focused heavily on the desired outcomes of the workshop. Members agreed that the primary objective should be to identify how future funding will be invested and what types of projects the Board wishes to support. It was recognised that future investment may involve direct commissioning, partnership projects or strategic initiatives rather than relying solely on grant programmes. Members stressed that the workshop should also focus on developing practical delivery options and should help the Board move towards an agreed investment plan for future years.

6.9. It was agreed that the December workshop should primarily be a Board session, focused on developing shared understanding and establishing future priorities. Following the workshop, wider engagement could then take place with relevant partners, organisations and stakeholders to support project development. Members discussed examples of future partnership opportunities, including collaborative approaches to education, community enterprise, shared services, data sharing and community-led projects. The Board agreed that once priority areas are identified, structured conversations should be held with organisations that may be able to contribute expertise, resources or delivery capacity.

6.10. **Agreed: The workshop will focus on identifying Board priorities, projects and investment approaches for the programme.**

6.11. **Agreed: To present the proposed workshop agenda to the Smethwick Partnership Board for input.**

7. Summary of actions and agreements

7.1. **Actions**

7.1.1. Officers to inform applicants that the programme is oversubscribed and encourage stronger partnership working where appropriate.

7.1.2. Officers to inform applicants that supporting evidence is encouraged to demonstrate partnership working/ match funding arrangements are confirmed.

7.2. **Agreements**

7.2.1. To approve grant application from Heart in the Stand (as reported to the Partnership Board on 11 September) and give authority to Sandwell Council to progress the grant agreements and administer the grant.

7.2.2. All 19 Expressions of Interest will progress to the full application stage.

7.2.3. The sifting process to address oversubscribed funding requests as outlined in section 4.9 of this document.

7.2.4. The Smethwick Partnership Board Engagement and Funding Subgroup Terms of Reference, and to present the document to the Smethwick Partnership Board for agreement at its meeting on 9 October 2026.

7.2.5. The December workshop will focus on identifying future priorities, projects and investment approaches for the programme and will be a Board-focused session, with wider partner engagement taking place afterwards where required.