



House of Commons
Public Accounts Committee

Selecting towns for the Towns Fund

**Twenty-Fourth Report of
Session 2019–21**

*Report, together with formal minutes relating
to the report*

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The Committee of Public Accounts

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Summary

The £3.6 billion Towns Fund was introduced at pace by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (the Department) in summer 2019. It relied upon Ministers selecting which towns would receive funding from a ranked list prepared by officials. The Department claims it had good reasons for this approach, but we are not convinced by the rationales for selecting some towns and not others. The justification offered by ministers for selecting individual towns are vague and based on sweeping assumptions. In some cases, towns were chosen by ministers despite being identified by officials as the very lowest priority (for example, one town selected ranked 535th out of 541 towns).

The Department has also not been open about the process it followed and it did not disclose the reasoning for selecting or excluding towns. This lack of transparency has fuelled accusations of political bias in the selection process, and has risked the Civil Service's reputation for integrity and impartiality. We are therefore disappointed that, although the Department's Permanent Secretary confirmed he was satisfied the selection process met the requirements of propriety and regularity, a summary of his Accounting Officer assessment remains unpublished.

It is still far from clear what impact the Department expects from the Towns Fund, when it expects to see the benefits, and how it will measure success both at the town level and across the whole programme. The Department says that it wished to give money to towns which it deemed unlikely to have the expertise to succeed at bidding for funding through an open competition; which also raises concerns about whether those towns will have the capacity to spend the money well. The impact of Covid-19 is also likely to mean that some towns will need to reconsider how best to spend the money, and that financially stretched towns will find it even harder to come up with match funding.

By experimenting with a different approach to local investment and bypassing existing structures the Department was taking an innovative approach. This makes it even more important for the Department to monitor the programme, identify and encourage what works, and act when things go wrong. With much remaining unclear about how the programme will be delivered or how the Department will oversee progress, we will be expecting regular updates from the Department so we can hold it to account for how it has used taxpayers' money.

Introduction

In July 2019, the government announced its intention to support a selection of struggling towns across England to develop and sustain strong local economies through the £3.6 billion Towns Fund. Officials from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (the Department) designed a process to support Ministers to select towns that gave them scope to use their own judgement on which towns to select. Officials provided Ministers with information on the need and growth potential of towns across England in a prioritised and ranked list, from which Ministers selected 101 towns. Ministers selected all 40 high-priority towns, then selected 61 from the pool of 501 low- and medium-priority towns, for which they recorded their reasons for selection. Officials later reviewed the Ministers' selection of towns against the required tests set out in HM Treasury's *Managing public money*, concluding the selection was appropriate. The National Audit Office's report sets out in detail the process followed by the Department to select the 101 towns. In September 2019, the Department published its selection of towns and invited them to set up a Town Deal Board and bid for funding to implement a Town Deal that departmental officials would agree—a plan setting out the town's investment priorities to drive growth. The Department is currently assessing bids submitted by the first cohort of 13 towns.

Conclusions and recommendations

1. **The selection process was not impartial.** Ministers chose most of the towns from a large group deemed eligible, based on assumptions around broad criteria. Although departmental officials scored and ranked all towns across England against a set of criteria, such as income deprivation, the selection process gave Ministers discretion to choose which individual towns would be eligible to bid. The Department believes pre-selecting towns to bid for money benefited towns that lacked the capacity and experience to put together competitive bids and would be disadvantaged by an open bidding process, and that ministerial selection enabled a better geographical spread of towns. Furthermore, it argues that the process included appropriate limits on ministerial discretion by restricting the selection to the half of towns in England with the highest levels of income deprivation, through all 40 of the high-priority towns being selected, and by requiring Ministers to record their rationales for selection of 12 low-priority and 49 medium-priority towns. However, the rationales given for the selection of towns from the medium-priority group are scant and appear based on sweeping assumptions. The Department's Permanent Secretary confirmed that he was satisfied the selection process met the requirements of HM Treasury's *Managing public money*, a summary of his Accounting Officer assessment remains unpublished.

Recommendation: *Within one month of this report, the Department should share with the Committee the Accounting Officer assessment that gave assurance that the selection process met the requirements of Managing Public Money.*

2. **The Department has a weak and unconvincing justification for not publishing any information on the process it followed, which does not vindicate its lack of transparency.** The Department says that it did not reveal the detail behind its selection of towns so as not to raise local expectations about an unsuccessful town's likelihood of success in the forthcoming competitive round, and so as not to distort local behaviour to enhance their likelihood of success, despite at that stage not yet having decided which towns would be eligible for the competitive round or how it would be conducted. The Department's lack of transparency fuelled accusations of political bias in the selection process, and potentially is also a risk to the Civil Service's reputation for impartiality. The Department exacerbated concerns by misrepresenting the National Audit Office's report in statements to the press which said that the report concluded the selection process had been 'robust'; when the report includes no such statement. Now the NAO has published the underlying information used by the Department's officials to score towns, aspects of it are particularly interesting and we are pleased the Department has agreed to write to us with more detail on how the Department calculated the town-level scores, in particular around the risks from a no-deal Brexit.

Recommendation: *To avoid accusations that government is selecting towns for political reasons, the Department should be upfront and transparent about how it reaches funding decisions as the Towns Fund progresses, particularly the planned competitive round. The principle of openness and transparency should extend across the whole of government when it is selecting some local areas, but not others, to benefit from taxpayers' money.*

3. **It is unclear how much engagement and intelligence gathering, if any, Ministers held with local and regional representatives, to inform their selection of towns from the medium- and low-priority groups.** Departmental officials assessed towns against three qualitative criteria using the knowledge of the Department's area-based teams, rather than consult with local stakeholders, and collectively gave these criteria less weight compared with the quantitative criteria in its assessment. Similarly, Ministers decided they were better placed to make decisions themselves without seeking the views of local stakeholders, such as LEAs, local MPs and directly elected mayors, despite officials recommending to Ministers that they do so. The Department says that Ministers declined, in writing, to engage with elected mayors on the Towns Fund because they speak routinely with mayors on a range of matters that affect local areas. The Department believes that the necessary local partnerships are being developed through the new tier of governance—Town Deal Boards—being created to support planning and spending of the funding at the town level. The Department says it is satisfied that the Town Deal Boards are well constituted and claims they are working well. It is vital that the Boards continue to fully engage local stakeholders and consult with residents as towns develop bids.

Recommendation: *In its Treasury Minute response, the Department should set out how it will oversee Town Boards, and how it will ensure that all relevant local and regional bodies, and local residents, are involved in planning and implementing Town Deals.*

4. **It is still unclear what impact the Department is expecting from the Towns Fund, or when, and how the Department will measure its success.** Although the Department is positive about the quality of the 13 plans submitted by the first cohort of towns and describes how it is assessing plans against local need, it has yet to develop monitoring and evaluation processes or decide how it will measure the impact and success of the Towns Fund. The Department says that its monitoring regime will measure outcomes that gauge improvement in the health and vitality of towns. It also tells us that outcomes will depend on the nature of each project and set out a list of possible measures which included jobs created, footfall, qualification levels, levels of private investment and commuting times. However, taking job creation as an example, we are not convinced that the Department has thought through how it will define and measure job creation to ensure that the Towns Fund will result in additional, good quality, sustainable jobs.

Recommendation: *In its Treasury Minute response, the Department should set out how the Towns Fund programme will secure positive, long term outcomes, and the measures of success it intends to use to monitor and evaluate its impact. In particular it should be clear about the measures against which it will measure any new jobs created.*

5. **We are concerned that towns may not have the capacity to deliver their plans and spend the money well.** The Department says that the towns most in need of investment would have been disadvantaged in a competitive bidding process because of a lack of leadership, resources or experience of dealing with government departments. The Department made £14 million available to towns to help them to develop their investment plans. The Department also made £8 million available for consultancy support to help towns with things like project management and valuing

real estate. While this funding may help towns to develop their plans, if these towns are indeed the ones least able to bid for funds then it must also raise concerns about their capacity to deliver their plans and spend the money well. The Department says that it is working at pace to agree the funding that will be available for the 13 towns in the first cohort but warns that it could take up to 12 months to agree business cases and issue final approvals before projects can begin. The Department has profiled the funding over the next four financial years but does not know yet whether the profile it has developed aligns with towns' individual investment plans.

Recommendation: *From the end of March 2021, the Department should write to the Committee with annual updates to provide assurance that it is spending the money well. The Department's updates should demonstrate that its due diligence processes have included an assessment of towns' capacity to successfully deliver their plans.*

6. **It is not clear how the Towns Fund fits with other government funding programmes with overlapping aims.** The Department confirms that, despite the impact of Covid-19 on government spending plans, the £3.6 billion funding allocated to the Towns Fund is secure. It has no plans to do anything other than continue with the Towns Fund and to deliver the fund in a way that maximises the long-term economic growth and productivity of the towns. The Department also confirms that many of the bids are aligned with other funds, both from central and local government, and highlights the importance of aligning the Towns Fund projects with other interventions. But the specific aims of the Towns Fund and how it fits with other, similar programmes of government funding such as the Future High Streets Fund are unclear.

Recommendation: *The Government should use the opportunity provided by the Spending Review to be clear about the strategic fit of the Towns Fund programme with other funding programmes across government.*

7. **The impact of Covid-19 is likely to mean that some towns' plans for how best to spend the money will need to be revisited.** We are very concerned about the short-term and long-term effects of Covid-19 on towns, and high streets in particular. The Department tells us that its guidance steers towns to think carefully about investments that increase retail space in towns, given that Covid-19 may have accelerated some of the challenges for the high street. We are also concerned that Covid-19 will reduce towns ability to raise match funding for its plans. The Department says that it will help towns to meet the challenges of Covid-19 by giving towns with exceptionally good and well-evidenced plans more than £25 million, the original maximum funding limit, and that towns that have been more adversely affected by Covid-19 may have a greater likelihood of securing funding. It also plans to bring forward £80 million of the Towns Fund with each town receiving between £500,000 and £1 million. We remain concerned though that as the pandemic continues to affect towns, some will find that their plans need to change to respond to new challenges, and the Department needs to be alive to this.

Recommendation: *In its Treasury Minute response, the Department should set out how it is responding to the ongoing impact of Covid-19 on towns and their ability to implement their proposals for spending the funding and on the timeline for releasing funding.*

1 The selection process

1. On the basis of a report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, we took evidence from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (the Department) about the Towns Fund.¹
2. In July 2019, the government announced its intention to support a selection of struggling towns across England through the £3.6 billion Towns Fund, which incorporated and built on the £1.6 billion Stronger Towns Fund announced in March 2019. The Towns Fund aims to help towns develop and sustain strong local economies through addressing issues such as ageing populations, limited regional economic opportunities and lack of investment.² The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (the Department) published its selection of 101 towns in September 2019, inviting them to set up a Town Deal Board and to bid for up to £25 million to implement an agreed Town Deal – a plan setting out the town’s investment priorities to drive growth.³
3. Departmental officials designed a framework for decision-making to support Ministers to select towns and record their reasons for selection, with scope for Ministers to make qualitative judgements on the mix of towns selected. Officials assessed towns across England against seven criteria: four quantitative measures assessed using data held by the Department, the Office for National Statistics, and the Bank of England; and three qualitative measures based on officials’ assessments.⁴ The Department provided Ministers with this information in a prioritised and ranked list of towns, and suggestions on other factors they might consider in their selection. Officials later reviewed the Ministers’ selection of towns against the required tests set out in HM Treasury’s *Managing public money*. The Comptroller and Auditor General’s report sets out in more detail the process followed by the Department to select the 101 towns.⁵

Selecting towns

4. We heard from the Department how it designed a selection process that allowed Ministers discretion to choose from a pool of 541 towns, comprising the 50% most deprived towns in England based on a measure of income deprivation.⁶ Departmental officials scored and ranked these 541 towns against a set of seven criteria that measured towns’ local need and growth potential, and then divided the towns into high-, medium- and low-priority groups.⁷ This information was provided to Ministers to inform their selection of towns. When challenged on why it did not simply offer all towns in England the opportunity to bid for funding, the Department told us that it decided not to run a competitive bidding process due to concern that such a process would be unfair to towns that lacked capacity and experience to develop a bid; towns which may be most in need of investment.⁸

1 C&AG’s Report, *Review of the Town Deals selection process*, Session 2019–2020, HC 576, 21 July 2020

2 C&AG’s Report, para 1.1

3 Q 60; C&AG’s Report, para 1.4

4 C&AG’s Report, paras 1.5, 2.2

5 C&AG’s Report, paras 1.5, 2.6

6 Q 40

7 Qq 36–38; C&AG’s Report, paras 2.2, 2.4

8 Qq 34, 40

5. The Department's view was that it was right that Ministers could apply their qualitative judgment and decisions to the final selection of towns.⁹ It argued that by restricting eligibility to these 541 towns, and through Ministers selecting all 40 high-priority towns, Ministers effectively selected from a reduced pool of relatively needy towns—the medium- and low-priority towns—within which ministerial discretion was justified.¹⁰ The Department also contended that Ministers wanted a geographical spread of towns within regions and between different types and sizes of town with different backgrounds, and that ministerial selection enabled this to be achieved. We heard from the Department how Ministers selected towns from the low-priority group with specific investment opportunities, for example, Morley in Yorkshire and the Humber that wanted to invest in transport hubs.¹¹

6. We challenged the Department on whether it had concerns over political bias in the Ministers' selection of towns, not least because 12 low-priority towns were selected over the majority of medium-priority towns. The Department argued that the process included an appropriate safeguard through requiring Ministers to be very clear about their decisions and record very clearly why they made the judgments they did for their selection of the 12 low-priority and 49 medium-priority towns.¹² However, the rationales given for the selection of towns from the medium-priority group are vague and broad-brush. The Department's Permanent Secretary confirmed that he was satisfied the selection process met the requirements of HM Treasury's Managing public money, but he would not commit to sharing his Accounting Officer assessment with the committee.¹³ He has since written to the Committee with a summary of his assessment provided in confidence, and on which we therefore will not comment. It remains unpublished.

Transparency over the selection process

7. The Department argued that it did not reveal the detail behind its selection of towns so as not to raise local expectations about an unsuccessful town's likelihood of success in the forthcoming competitive round, and so as not to distort local behaviour to enhance their likelihood of success. These are weak reasons that were not accepted by the National Audit Office on the grounds that the public-interest case for transparency justified publishing the details of the process.¹⁴ The Department should have been transparent from the outset.¹⁵

8. The Department's lack of transparency fuelled accusations of political bias in the selection process.¹⁶ Furthermore, the Department's statements to the press, issued after the National Audit Office's report was published, referred to the report concluding that the selection process had been 'robust', whereas the report makes no such statement—which is a clear misrepresentation of the National Audit Office's report. The Department's Permanent Secretary said he did not have knowledge of these press statements.¹⁷

9 Q 36

10 Qq 35, 40, 102

11 Q 40

12 Qq 40–41

13 Qq 41–45

14 Qq 38–39, 103

15 Q 103; C&AG's Report, paras 1.5–1.6

16 Qq 41, 52, 102

17 Qq 105–108; and, for example, [Financial Times 21 July 2020](#)

9. Other examples of lack of clarity around the Towns Fund process are also of concern to us. The Department gave a confusing explanation for how and why the risks from a no-deal Brexit were assessed by Ministers, when already included in Departmental officials' assessment. The Department agreed to write to the Committee on how Bank of England data were used to assess towns' exposure to Brexit.¹⁸ Furthermore, the Department has yet to decide which towns across England will be eligible for the upcoming competitive round, or when and how it will be conducted.¹⁹ The Department told us it wants to complete its assessment of the first cohort of bids before planning the competitive round, and it hopes to have completed that assessment by the end of October.²⁰

Engagement with local and regional representatives

10. We heard from the Department that its officials had assessed each town against three qualitative criteria using the knowledge of its area-based teams, rather than consulting directly with local stakeholders. The Department argued that it gave more weight to the quantitative criteria in its assessment, and that its area-based teams have a lot of contact, engagement and dialogue with local areas, which means that their views are informed.²¹ Similarly, we heard that Ministers relied on the Department's area-based teams rather than consult with local stakeholders, including Local Enterprise Partnerships and local MPs.²² Of particular concern is that directly elected mayors were not consulted, despite officials specifically recommending to Ministers that they do so.²³ Ministers explicitly rejected the recommendation, deciding they wanted to make decisions themselves without seeking local views.²⁴ The Department clarified that Ministers speak regularly with mayors but that dedicated engagement on the Towns Fund did not take place.²⁵

11. We queried why the Department had required a new tier of governance—Town Deal Boards—to be set up, rather than use existing governance structures to plan and implement the Towns Fund at the local level. The Department explained that existing structures, such as mayoral combined authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships, were not appropriate for overseeing support and interventions for individual towns. It said that government's original rationale for the Towns Fund was to recognise and respond to issues at the town level, as place-based policies had previously been too focused on cities and resulted in towns being overlooked.²⁶

12. The Department told us that it is satisfied that the Town Deal Boards are well constituted, meeting departmental stipulations, and coming together well. Boards are involving the private sector and the wider social sector, with examples of some Boards being chaired by private sector business people and others by chairs of charities. The Department expressed confidence that through the Boards the right local coalitions were being developed to put together successful bids and deliver on their plans.²⁷ We heard how some towns are consulting with residents as they develop bids, for example

18 Qq 04–101

19 Qq 29–30, 32, 46–47, 58–59

20 Qq 31, 59

21 Qq 36, 50, 82–84

22 Qq 82–84

23 Qq 49–55

24 Qq 54–55

25 Qq 98–100

26 Q 91

27 Q 61

Blackpool, which invited comments from residents on draft versions of its plan through the council's website.²⁸ We reiterate the vital importance of Boards fully engaging with local stakeholders and consulting with residents as towns develop bids—ensuring this happens will be a key role for the Department's observers on the Boards.²⁹

28 Q 62

29 Q 85

2 Making a success of the Towns Fund

Monitoring and evaluating impact

13. The Department told us that it had not completed its analysis of the 13 plans submitted by the first cohort of towns but its early impressions of the quality of the plans and the range of interventions proposed were positive.³⁰ It described how it was assessing town investment plans against local need, including the extent to which the plans show that towns have started to put together the partnerships they will need to deliver their plans successfully.³¹

14. Given our concerns in the past about the Department's failure to put in place quantifiable objectives to help it measure the impact of its interventions on local economic growth, we asked the Department how it intended to approach this for the Towns Fund, to properly measure impacts such as job creation and improved wellbeing.³² The Department explained that it hopes its monitoring regime will measure outcomes that gauge improvement in the health and vitality of towns.³³ The Department expects outcomes to depend on the nature of each project, but it wants to be able to look at a basket of measures at three different levels: the project level, the town investment plan level, and the overall programme level. It outlined how it plans to monitor the impacts of the Towns Deals on employment, income and wellbeing against the baseline of what is happening in those towns and, in due course, compare the performance of towns that have benefitted from the Towns Fund with other, similar towns.³⁴

15. The Department told us that it is looking to probe each project to gauge how convinced it is that towns can deliver their plans successfully, and that it will build in robust monitoring and evaluation processes from the start, agreeing key outputs and outcomes such as jobs created and footfall before projects begin, and tracking them every six months.³⁵ It has developed a prospectus and guidance which sets out a list of possible measures including jobs created, footfall, qualification levels, levels of private investment and commuting times.³⁶ The Department told us that it wants the measures, when chosen, to mean something to local people. As an example, it cited how it is considering how it can reflect and measure sustainable, rather than short-term, employment.³⁷ But we remain concerned that the Department could only set out to us in general terms how it might monitor and evaluate the impact of the Towns Fund; the detailed measures are still to be developed.

Capacity to deliver and spend the money well

16. The Department's rationale for opting for "a deals-based approach" to funding, rather than a competitive bidding process, was because towns most in need of investment would have been disadvantaged in a competitive bidding process due to a lack of leadership, resources or experience of dealing with government departments. The Department

30 Qq 60, 72–73

31 Q 60

32 Qq 85–86

33 Q 88

34 Qq 85–86

35 Qq 60, 85

36 Q 85

37 Q 88

explained that a deals-based approach to selection enabled it to provide advice and support to help towns develop their bid and build capacity.³⁸ With this in mind, the Department allocated around £14 million of “capacity funding” to towns that are eligible for the Towns Fund, to support them in developing their plans. The Department cited project management as an example of a common area where towns would need some help.³⁹

17. The Department further told us that it had entered into a contract worth around £8 million with Arup, a professional services company, to provide towns with specific expertise in areas such as real estate valuation. The Department described the efficiency benefits it envisages in such an arrangement, whereby towns will access consultancy services centrally so that they do not have to look for that consultancy support separately.⁴⁰

18. The Department told us that it is working at pace to agree the funding that will be available for the 13 towns in the first cohort and would like to be able to make decisions in October. But the Department did not want to guarantee it would meet that deadline and warned that it could take up to 12 months to agree business cases and issue final approvals before projects can begin.⁴¹ The Department told us that, while it would like to see as many projects as possible happen as quickly as possible, given the nature of construction projects and minor infrastructure works, if they are to happen robustly and safely, it would be some time before we see many projects on the ground.⁴²

19. The Department has developed a funding profile for the Towns Fund over the next four financial years but does not know yet whether it aligns with towns’ individual investment plans. The Department explained that it wants the profile of funding over time to be led by what works in terms of project delivery and that, as part of its assessment process, it wants to properly understand the profile of the individual projects that towns have put forward.⁴³ Once it has this understanding, it will consolidate it at programme level to see if the funding profile is appropriate. However, the Department explained that the availability of this information requires towns to draft individual business cases for each project and that it would probably be well into next year before it had detailed financial profiles across the individual towns, and then at programme level.⁴⁴

Alignment with other funds

20. The £3.6 billion Towns Fund has three separate strands of funding comprising:

- The 101 selected towns invited to develop Town Deals and bid for up to £25 million each, or up to £50 million in exceptional circumstances;
- A competition for funding for those towns not in the initial selection of 101 towns; and
- The Future High Streets Fund, to be distributed to towns and high streets across England through a competitive process.⁴⁵

38 Q 34

39 Q 63

40 Q 63

41 Qq 76, 92

42 Q 92

43 Qq 79–80

44 Qq 80–81

45 C&AG’s Report, para 1.2

21. The Department confirmed that, despite the impact of Covid-19 on government spending plans, the £3.6 billion funding allocated to the Towns Fund is secure. It told us that it had no plans to do anything other than continue with the Towns Fund and to deliver the fund in a way that maximises the long-term economic growth and productivity of the towns.⁴⁶

22. We asked the Department whether, given the scale of change happening, it will bid for higher levels of funding to support the Future High Streets Fund. It explained that, as many of the towns that are eligible for Future High Streets funding are also eligible for Towns Fund funding, it will probably want to take a view on the Towns Fund as a whole and these two elements of it before deciding what the right level of future funding would be.⁴⁷

23. The Department told us that many of the bids are aligned with other funds, both from central and local government, and highlighted the importance of aligning the Towns Fund projects with other interventions.⁴⁸ But the specific aims of the Towns Fund and how it fits with other, similar programmes of government funding remain unclear.

The impact of Covid-19

24. A consistent theme highlighted in the town plans that the Department has seen so far is the impact of Covid-19, leading towns to think about a more diverse range of uses for the high street. The Department told us that its guidance steers towns to think carefully about investments that increase retail space in towns, given that Covid-19 may have accelerated some of the challenges for the high street. The Department shared with us some example projects such as Darlington's plan to expand the provision of T-levels and build a new centre to teach T-levels in town, and the repurposing of retail space as a library in Margate.⁴⁹

25. How the impact of Covid-19 will influence decisions about how the Department allocates the Towns Fund is unclear. Whether towns that have been adversely affected by Covid-19 will have a greater likelihood of selection, or whether events may mean that some of the plans set out in winning bids are now less of a priority, is still to be determined. The Department told us that it will help towns to meet the challenges of Covid-19 by giving towns with exceptionally good and well-evidenced plans more than £25 million, the original maximum funding limit, and that towns that have been more adversely affected by Covid-19 may have a greater likelihood of securing funding.⁵⁰

26. The Department explained that because of Covid-19 and the recent demands that have been placed on local government, the private sector and other members of the Town Deal Boards, it has left towns and the Town Deal Boards to determine which wave of funding they wanted to work towards.⁵¹ While the Department wants to maximise private sector co-investment, the impact of Covid-19 may reduce the ability of towns to secure match funding from other sources.⁵²

46 Qq 33, 57

47 Q 28

48 Qq 74, 91

49 Q 67

50 Qq 68–70

51 Q 77

52 Q 74

27. The Department has brought forward £80 million of the Towns Fund, with each eligible town receiving between £500,000 and £1 million for projects that will make a difference to the area, such as new green spaces, the creation of pop-up businesses spaces, pedestrianisation of streets to encourage walking or cycling, and creating new community hubs to support those living alone.⁵³ The Department told us that towns have told it what kind of immediate measures they may be able to take in this financial year, and the brought-forward funding will support them in this.⁵⁴

53 Qq 27, 75; [Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, Press release, 25 September 2020](#)

54 Q 27

Formal minutes

Monday 2 November 2020

Virtual meeting

Members present:

Meg Hillier, in the Chair

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown	Richard Holden
Barry Gardiner	Sir Bernard Jenkin
Dame Cheryl Gillan	Sarah Olney
Peter Grant	James Wild

Draft Report (*Selecting towns for the Towns Fund*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 27 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Introduction agreed to.

Conclusions and recommendations agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Twenty fourth of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Thursday 5 November at 9:15a

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Monday 21 September 2020

Jeremy Pocklington, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government; **Emran Mian**, Director General, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government; **Stephen Jones**, Co-Director, Cities and Local Growth Unit, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

[Q1-111](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

ITF numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

1 Hanretty, Chris ([ITF0001](#))

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website. The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Session 2019–21

First Report	Support for children with special educational needs and disabilities	HC 85
Second Report	Defence Nuclear Infrastructure	HC 86
Third Report	High Speed 2: Spring 2020 Update	HC 84
Fourth Report	EU Exit: Get ready for Brexit Campaign	HC 131
Fifth Report	University Technical Colleges	HC 87
Sixth Report	Excess votes 2018–19	HC 243
Seventh Report	Gambling regulation: problem gambling and protecting vulnerable people	HC 134
Eighth Report	NHS expenditure and financial management	HC 344
Ninth Report	Water supply and demand	HC 378
Tenth Report	Defence Capability and the Equipment Plan	HC 247
Eleventh Report	Local authority investment in commercial property	HC 312
Twelfth Report	Management of tax reliefs	HC 379
Thirteenth Report	Whole of Government Response to Covid-19	HC 404
Fourteenth Report	Readying the NHS and social care for the COVID-19 peak	HC 405
Fifteenth Report	Improving the prison estate	HC 244
Sixteenth Report	Progress in remediating dangerous cladding	HC 506
Seventeenth Report	Immigration enforcement	HC 407
Eighteenth Report	NHS nursing workforce	HC 408
Nineteenth Report	Restoration and renewal of the Palace of Westminster	HC 549

Twentieth Report	Tackling the tax gap	HC 650
Twenty-First Report	Government support for UK exporters	HC 679
Twenty-Second Report	Digital transformation of the NHS	HC 680