



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP  
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government  
2 Marsham Street  
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11 June 2021

**Towns Fund**

This week you announced that a further 30 towns in England will share £725m from the Towns Fund, and that the total investment so far is £2bn across 83 Towns Deals.

While I welcome any funding – especially in light of the huge cuts to councils since 2010, which has decimated local services – I am concerned money is not being distributed fairly and it is crucial that Ministers are transparent about decision-making.

In Yorkshire and the Humber, parts of the constituency and the immediate surrounding area were placed in the mid-priority group by MHCLG officials but not then chosen by Ministers to bid for Town Deal funding – Thurnscoe, Barnsley, Mexborough, Bolton-upon-Deerne, Rawmarsh, Wath-upon-Deerne – while others from the low-priority group were.

Their total score calculated by officials in your department was higher than all those selected from the mid and low-priority groups, except Goole.

These areas are all more deprived than those chosen, when measured by local authority (Barnsley ranked 38<sup>th</sup>, Rotherham 44<sup>th</sup>) or constituency (Wentworth & Deerne 85<sup>th</sup>, Brigg and Goole 323<sup>rd</sup>, Penistone and Stocksbridge 340<sup>th</sup>)<sup>1</sup>. They were also judged by officials to have more, or equal, growth potential.

The Public Accounts Committee was not convinced by Ministers' rationales for selecting some towns over others, and said justifications were vague, scant and based on sweeping assumptions.<sup>2</sup>

Officials' record of Ministers' reasons for selecting towns from the medium priority group states:

*"[Yorkshire and the Humber] includes towns which score very highly in terms of the Index of Multiple Deprivation measure of income deprivation..."<sup>3</sup>*

So why weren't the most deprived towns as measured by the IMD chosen? In the mid-priority group, Thurnscoe and Bolton-upon-Deerne scored 0.86 for income deprivation and were not invited to bid for Towns Fund money, while in the same category Goole (scoring 0.40) and Whitby (scoring 0.65) were.

Ministers also provided an explanation for their selection of towns from the low priority group. For example:

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019>

<sup>2</sup> <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/127/public-accounts-committee/news/120657/pac-not-convinced-by-rationale-for-opaque-and-not-impartial-towns-fund-selections/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/review-of-the-town-deals-selection-process/>

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**Brighouse** – said to have been chosen because of low productivity. Yet its productivity score is 0.70, better than that of any of the mid-priority towns in South Yorkshire that were not picked.

**Morley** – chosen because it has low productivity and is at risk of economic shocks. Yet its 'economic shocks' score is 0, behind mid-priority towns that were not selected, such as Barnsley and Batley (both 0.5).

**Todmorden** – selected because it has 'severe pockets of deprivation' and 'regeneration opportunities'. However officials gave it a deprivation score of 0.70, below all the South Yorkshire towns in the mid-priority group not invited to bid for the Towns Fund, and an investment opportunity score of 0, below most towns in the mid-priority group.

Therefore, these arguments for selecting low priority towns fail to stand up to scrutiny and fail to justify Ministers' decisions to choose them over others with more need and growth potential.

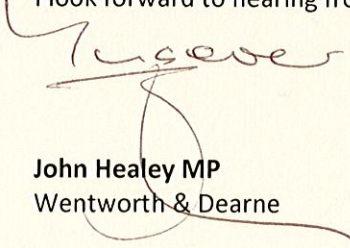
I recently asked Parliamentary Questions about the decision-making process but I'm afraid the Minister's answers will not satisfy my constituents.

I'd be grateful for your response on the following:

- Why, in Yorkshire and the Humber, were Thurnscoe, Barnsley, Mexborough, Bolton-upon-Deerne, Rawmarsh and Wath-upon-Deerne not invited to bid for Towns Fund funding when their total score, an assessment by department officials of their need and growth potential, was higher than Whitby, Shipley, Wakefield, Todmorden, Stocksbridge, Brighouse and Morley, which were invited to bid?
- Why were Thurnscoe, Barnsley, Mexborough, Bolton-upon-Deerne, Rawmarsh and Wath-upon-Deerne not invited to bid for Towns Fund funding when department officials scored them higher for income deprivation than Goole, Whitby, Wakefield, Todmorden and Brighouse, which were invited to bid?
- Why in Yorkshire and the Humber were four low-priority areas invited to bid for Towns Fund funding while 33 mid-priority areas were not?
- Why were only 16 towns in Yorkshire and the Humber selected, when officials recommended 19, while Ministers selected more towns than recommended in the East Midlands (+5), the South West (+3) and the South East (+3)?
- Was there any consultation with our Mayor or Sheffield City Region before Ministers made their final selection, as officials recommended?
- Which Ministers were responsible for selecting the Yorkshire and the Humber towns invited to bid for the Towns Fund?

In addition, and in order to make the decision-making process as open and transparent as possible, I would like to receive copies of all information between July 2019 and March 2021 relating to the selection of the mid and low-priority towns in Yorkshire and the Humber that were invited to bid for the Towns Fund. Please deal with this request under the Freedom of Information Act if necessary.

I look forward to hearing from you.

  
**John Healey MP**  
Wentworth & Dearne