



Policy & Resources Committee:
Tuesday 19 November 2024

Report of: Assistant Director of Planning & Regulatory Services

Relevant Lead Member: Councillor Melissa Parlour

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SUBJECT: UK Shared Prosperity and Rural England Prosperity Fund – Update

Wards affected: (All Wards);

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To provide an update on the delivery of the Council's UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) investment programme.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That the content of the report be noted.

3.0 BACKGROUND - UK Shared Prosperity Fund

3.1 UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) was launched in April 2022 as part of the previous Government's approach to level up the whole of the United Kingdom. This funding succeeds the old European Union structural funds.

3.2 UKSPF is devolved to local authorities and is targeted towards interventions which focus on supporting three key areas:

- Communities & Place
- Supporting Local Businesses
- People & Skills

3.3 In September 2022 the Council was required to submit an Investment Plan for UKSPF to the then Department of Levelling Up Housing & Communities (DLUHC). Due to shortened

timescales officers consulted with the three respective political party leaders and gained consent to submit the outlined Investment Plan for West Lancashire. This was therefore approved by the Chief Operating Officer and Section 151 Officer and submitted to DLUHC.

- 3.4 West Lancashire's Investment Plan was approved in January 2023, and the Council was successful in securing £4.2 million of UKSPF in March 2023.
- 3.5 The Council's UKSPF Investment Plan is continuing to deliver against the three priority areas as detailed in this report. Project Leads have, with approval through the appropriate governance structure, amended projects and realigned finances to ensure efficient and effective delivery of the three priority areas, Community and Place, Supporting Local Business and People and Skills. Each of these priorities have been set by Government and are aligned to the relevant Levelling Up White Paper mission; to address our local needs and priorities.
- 3.6 Under each priority are a set of pre-defined interventions that will inform what the Council aims to deliver and sets out measurable outcomes to reflect local needs and opportunities.
- 3.7 The programme runs until 31 March 2025. Should UKSPF funds remain unspent on 31 March 2025, current guidance states that underspends will be returned to Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), formerly DLUHC).

4.0 CURRENT POSITION – COMMUNITIES AND PLACE PROJECTS

- 4.1 The following projects are in progress or have been delivered:

High Streets and Town Centres

- We have made improvements to Ormskirk Town Centre infrastructure and the market and installed new Ormskirk branded banners. Work is planned to make improvements to Clock Tower to protect this historic asset. This project is in its preliminary stages and will be completed by 31st March 2025

Community & Neighbourhood infrastructure projects

- Repairs to paths and car parks at Beacon Country Park and green space access work have been completed. We have purchased Trampers to enable better access for park visitors with mobility issues. Enhancements have been completed to the visitor building at Beacon Country Park to improve visitor experience.

Creation of and Improvements to local green spaces

- Chequer Lane, Upholland Improvements to paths and fishing pegs, along with installation of benches and signage has been completed.
- West End Park, Ormskirk, rebuilding of collapsed bank has been completed. Dean Wood works have been undertaken to improve footpaths. Tawd Valley Park – Bridge works are under way and the development of a heritage trail is near completion that will support local Arts, Cultural, Heritage & Creative Activities.

Events

- We have delivered a series of community events in Skelmersdale and Ormskirk 2023 and 2024 including Christmas Lights Switch on, Bank Holiday family events. Two Christmas events in both Ormskirk and Skelmersdale will be delivered in November 2024.

Support for active travel enhancements in local area

- Bikes have been purchased to encourage active travel. Delivery of family bike rides across the borough has been planned to increase participation from residents and support health and wellbeing.
- Survey works and fees associated with the delivery of two Linear Parks are under way.
- Canal Towpath improvements are continuing in Appley Bridge / Parbold

5.0 CURRENT POSITION – COMMUNITY AND PLACE GRANTS PROGRAMME

5.1 A total of 24 Community, Voluntary and Faith sector organisations have been successfully awarded a total of £1,307,837 funding to deliver, develop and sustain services and programmes within the community.

5.2 Funding made available was a combination of UKSPF and for those projects with Capital elements the offer of CIL funding as a 50% match which has enabled the Council to support the organisations listed below in a much greater capacity.

5.3 The organisations receiving UKSPF support include the following:

1. Artz for All
2. Stable Lives
3. Divine Days
4. Burscough Farm CIC
5. An Inclusive Future
6. SWLICAN
7. Sewing Rooms
8. Ormskirk West End Football Club
9. The Birchwood Centre
10. Skelmersdale Ecumenical
11. Hesketh Bank & Tarleton Helpers
12. Greenhill Community Hub
13. The Liberty Centre (Women's Refuge)
14. The Hub @ Banks
15. Dial a Ride
16. Shares Lancs
17. Volunteer it Yourself
18. West Lancs CVS
19. CAB Lancashire West
20. Upholland Hub
21. Ormskirk School (Endeavour Learning)
22. Birch Green ABC
23. Sporting Challenge
24. We Are Hope Street

5.4 Each of the funded organisations performance is closely monitored through regular partnership meetings. Officers are supporting the sector to build maturing relationships and set conditions which enable the partners to have security and sustainability in the future.

5.5 The diverse range of organisations and projects being delivered across the Borough continue to make a significant positive impact on the community. All the projects are delivering successful outcomes and outputs and both quantitative and qualitative insight is being gathered and shared.

- 5.6 A series of Community and Place workshops are being delivered each quarter with the aim of encouraging organisations to network, build relationships, collaborate and share their expertise, knowledge and experiences with others. Feedback has been gathered from each workshop to ensure the team facilitate information sharing, presentations and support that is relevant and useful to the organisations.
- 5.7 A further steering group has now been established as a result of the wider workshops, where interested organisations have discussed how they can work collaboratively to draw in significant investment to the sector through having a shared common purpose and trusted partnerships.
- 5.8 Some of the outputs from the Grants programme to date are:

Table 1

Grant	Output
Impactful volunteering and or social action	444 volunteering opportunities created
Local sports facilities tournaments teams	3 Tournaments 8 Teams 27 Leagues
Capacity building & infrastructure local groups	1093 training and capacity building sessions attended
Community measures to reduce cost of living	6758 People reached. 2930 Households receiving support. 628 Households supported for energy efficiency.

- 5.9 In addition, and with the support from the Council’s Communications Team, videos and testimonials have been created from several organisations who have received funding, to capture the stories, impact and opportunities that are being created in our communities. This is helping voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) organisations help tell their story and extend their reach to more partners and residents in need.

6.0 CURRENT POSITION – SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESSES

The following programmes have been developed:

Development & promotion of visitor economy

- 6.1 To continue to promote West Lancs as a visitor destination in partnership with Marketing Lancashire – annual subscription 2023/24 / & 2024/25 – ongoing until March 2025
- 6.2 To continue to deliver Green Tourism Award Programme to support retail, leisure, hospitality, accommodation, tourism sectors to become more environmentally conscious & sustainable, including opportunities to offer Edge Hill Students placements to support this activity. Programme has proven successful with 4 local businesses who have since become accredited. Programme is on track for completion March 2025.

Development of innovation infrastructure at a local level

- 6.3 Delivered in collaboration with Edge Hill University the programme is on track for success. The primary focus is on supporting SMEs who have the potential to scale up through innovative ways of working. Support from the UCLan engineering innovation team on product design and development. Programme is on track to finish March 2025
- 6.4 Embedded into the whole programme is a Leadership & Management course for business leaders and employees in management roles. To date 39 businesses have been supported.

Strengthening local entrepreneurial ecosystems

- 6.5 Boost Business Lancashire support is progressing very well, comprises of Flying Start programme aimed at start-ups, Growth Catalyst Programme for established businesses and Scale to Thrive for existing businesses to scale up. In excess of 70 businesses have been assisted to date. Programme is on track to finish March 2025.
- 6.6 Rural Business Support Programme – supporting rural business growth via a peer-to-peer programme, consisting of 2 x cohorts, with 15 businesses successfully completed, supported with opportunity to apply for small grants up to £8000.
- 6.7 To complement the peer-to-peer programme, twelve Embrace Digital Marketing workshops were delivered from January to March 2024 to upskill businesses with digital marketing skills. Due to demand a further eleven workshops will be delivered from September 2024 to November 2024. Consisting of a wide range of digital marketing topics to support local businesses. To date over 100 people have attended training workshops.
- 6.8 Due to demand and success of the above programmes, a third peer to peer programme has been launched in September 2024, that supports non rural businesses and includes a further round of small grants and Embrace Digital workshops.

Supporting decarbonisation & improving the natural environment

- 6.9 The Chamber Low Carbon Support Programme is eligible to businesses who have premises and can support all sectors and businesses of all sizes. Businesses will gain a fully funded energy audit and decarbonisation plan for their premises as well as one to one support to help drive down carbon emissions and reduce energy costs. Programme will finish March 2025

Business support measures to drive employment growth

- 6.10 Licence to Sew – successful programme that support local textile manufacturers who have identified a critical skills gap with hard to fill vacant roles. The programme works with social enterprise The Sewing Rooms who offer a 10-week programme to train local people aged 17+ to become skilled machinists and gain employment. The success has so far seen a 60% into employment, 20% into self-employment and 20% on further training. The success has also seen a demand to run evening and weekend courses from September 2024 – March 2025. Programme is on track to finish March 2025

Training hubs, business support offers, incubators & accelerators.

- 6.11 The Skelmersdale Ambassadors Network has delivered three large events this year, and is growing in strength and numbers, bringing together businesses and organisations from across the Borough to connect and collaborate and celebrate Skelmersdale / West Lancs as a great place to live, work, invest, visit and study. With the number of attendees

reaching in excess of 100 per event. The network has over 60 Ambassadors currently signed up, with numbers steadily growing. This intervention also supports the cost of local venues, meeting rooms, and catering at training workshops & Ambassadors events. As well as promotional materials to promote the network. Programme is due to finish March 2025.

7.0 CURRENT POSITION – PEOPLE AND SKILLS

The following programme has been developed:

- 7.1 The People and Skills strand has been delivered via the Workplace Wellbeing and Employability Team over the last 9 months.
- 7.2 Officers have worked to secure, develop and launch a new Employability Hub "The Nest" based at 61 Westgate. The venue allows the team to co-locate with partners such as Social Prescribing, Mental Health Teams, Money Advice services, West Lancashire College to deliver courses, appointments, and a collective approach to support for individuals.
- 7.3 Officers are working with West Lancashire College to support the Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)) Programme which launches in October 24 and provides a bespoke course for students who are NEET and in need of additional support. West Lancashire College have booked to deliver the NEET training course for students using the Nest venue and offer students the opportunity to learn outside of the college environment.
- 7.4 Officers have engaged and supported 148 economically inactive residents since January 2024, and continue to support individuals through a range of employment support, basic life and career skills, volunteering and courses.
- 7.5 The Workplace Wellbeing Officer has developed and delivered a range of Workplace courses free of charge to several organisations across the borough. Courses include mental health awareness, stress management, healthy eating, and physical activity.

8.0 RURAL ENGLAND PROSPERITY FUND (REPF)

- 8.1 The REPF was launched in September 2022 and is a top up to the UKSPF and is available to eligible local authorities across England. It succeeds the European Union funding from LEADER (a French acronym that translates as 'Liaisons among actors in the rural economy') a previous EU programme that provided funding for businesses and organisations looking to begin or expand their operations in rural areas; and the Growth Programme which were part of the Rural Development Programme for England.
- 8.2 West Lancashire's REPF addendum application was submitted in November 2022 and was successful in securing £441,630 of REPF in April 2023. REPF must be used to fund capital projects for small businesses and community infrastructure and will help to improve productivity and strengthen the rural economy and rural communities.
- 8.3 REPF objectives sit within the UKSPF investment priorities for Supporting Local Businesses and Communities and Place and will aim to meet the below interventions that align with the UKSPF. It is therefore recommended that the two funding streams are aligned as is required through the national government reporting framework.

- 8.4 The Council was allocated £441,630 in REPF, the total sum of which covers the financial years 2023/24 and 2024/25. 25% of the allocation will be provided for the financial year 2023/24, with the remainder being made available for 2024/25.
- 8.5 Current guidance states any underspend at the end of each financial year will need to be returned to Central Government.

9.0 PURPOSE OF REPF

REPF Supporting Local Businesses

- 9.1 The Rural England Prosperity funds supports new and existing rural businesses to develop new products and or facilities that will be of wider benefit to the local economy. This includes farm businesses looking to diversify into new income streams. The funding has been distributed via capital grants to businesses for the development and promotion (both trade and consumer) of the visitor economy.

A West Lancashire Rural Business Grant was launched in October 2023, out of 8 applications received, 7 applications were approved to deliver capital projects which are currently underway. Projects will support the visitor economy, aims to increase visitors to the area and sustain and attract employment across the rural business community.

The following organisations have secured a WL Rural Grant

- The Ship Lathom
- Waterworth & Sons
- West Lancashire Light Railway
- P&N Riding
- Windmill Animal Farm
- Ralphs Wife's Coffee & Bar
- Secret Garden Glamping

REPF Community and Place

- 9.2 To support new and improved community infrastructure, providing essential community services and assets for local people and businesses to benefit the local economy.
- 9.2.1 Installation of a Changing Places facility at Beacon Country Park to support those who are in need of accessible toilet and shower facilities. This facility provides more freedom for families and individuals visiting Beacon Park and the surrounding area to enjoy days out, safe in the knowledge that there are facilities are onsite or nearby that meet their needs.

10.0 GOVERNANCE

- 10.1 The Council has the overall responsibility and accountability for the administration of the UKSPF. The UKSPF Programme Board meets regularly to assess and monitor project performance, including programme risks which are managed effectively and monitored throughout the course of UKSPF.
- 10.2 As part of the UKSPF Governance procedures, the Council is required to have an independent local Partnership Board established that is fully represented by communities,

private / public & third sector, with terms of reference that will oversee and meet UKSPF/REPF needs.

10.3 The purpose of the West Lancashire Partnership Board is to provide guidance and advice on the strategic fit and deliverability of the activities funded by UKSPF.

11.0 FUNDING

11.1 Through a process of consultation with the Deputy Chief Executive and oversight from the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources (Section 151), Officers have reprofiled Year 2 underspend across the following levels of investment.

Table 2

Stream	Total Allocation Year 2	Total Allocation Year 3	Total
Communities and Place	£1,055,778	£1,290,777	£2,346,555
Local Business	£ 516,500	£ 799,067	£1,315,567
People and Skills	£0	£594,587	£594,587
Total	£1,572,278	£2,684,431	£4,256,709

Table 3

Stream	Total Allocation Year 2	Total Allocation Year 3	Total
REPF	£110,408	£331,222	£441,630

11.2 Key areas of re-alignment of UKSPF underspend will be reallocated to support the delivery of the projects listed below. These include renewable energy initiatives, green space and Beacon Park improvements. A new project has been identified to support the refurbishment at Burscough Sports Centre. All projects can be delivered within the timescales.

- Burscough Sports Centre – refurbishment (capital works) - new project
- Skelmersdale Solar Farm – preliminary feasibility work – existing project
- Beacon County Park – feasibility plan – existing project
- Skelmersdale Master Plan – preliminary work – existing project

12.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

12.1 During the development of the UKSPF Investment Plan and REPF Addendum, the Council has taken steps to ensure that proposals are financially viable and affordable.

12.2 Funding for the UKSPF programmes is due to finish 31 March 2025, with no confirmation of any additional funds being made available at this stage. All staff funded via UKSPF have fixed term contracts which terminate on 30th June 2025.

13.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

13.1 A programme risk log is updated monthly as part of the programme controls. The most prominent risks associated with UKSPF and REPF funding are identified below.

13.2 Risk - Failure to spend all UKSPF funding by 31 March 2025/failure to spend annual allocation of REPF funding, resulting in funds being returned to central government.

- Impact:
 - Adverse impact on outcomes experienced by residents, communities, and businesses.
 - Adverse impact of cost-of-living crisis on communities and businesses to be more acute.
 - Risks to the sustainability of third sector organisations and businesses.
 - Reduced ability of the Council to take active steps to meet net zero - commitments.
 - Reputational risk to Council.
- Mitigations
 - Development of UKSPF/REPF investment programme.
 - Submission of UKSPF and REPF biannual report to MHCLG due 1 November 2024. The report will evidence the programmes outputs and outcomes alongside the actual and forecasted expenditure for the remaining 6months.

13.3 Risk - Cost inflation (capital, staff costs etc.) rising at levels higher than anticipated within Investment Plan and Addendum.

- Impact:
 - Intended projects are unable to be delivered within indicative funding envelopes.
 - The level of outputs and outcomes identified within the bid cannot be achieved.
- Mitigations:
 - A reasonable expectation for level of inflation has been built into project financials.
 - Ongoing market engagement to ensure that budgets and expectations are achievable.

13.4 Risk – Insufficient staff capacity to provide appropriate levels of contract management.

- Impact:
 - The Council may be unable to effectively monitor and evaluate the impact of the awards and funds.
 - Inability to provide sufficient evidence against UKSPF Outcomes and Outputs
 - Staff welfare and impact on the ability to continue to deliver other Council priorities.
- Mitigations
 - Utilise specialist support opportunities within the administrative allocation.
 - Appointment of additional officer resource to support the delivery, monitoring and reporting of UKSPF.
 - Embed a robust monitoring and evaluation process within the procured contracts/services
 - Utilise the Councils social return on investment platform to collate evidence.

14.0 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 The proposal will have health and wellbeing benefits across all wards of the authority as it promotes and supports businesses, people and communities to access opportunities meet local priorities.

Background Documents

The following background documents (as defined in Section 100D (5) of the Local Government Act 1972) have been relied on to a material extent in preparing this Report.

None.

Equality Impact Assessment

There is a significant direct impact on members of the public, employees, elected members and / or stakeholders. Therefore an Equality Impact Assessment is required. A formal equality impact assessment is attached as an Appendix to this report, the results of which have been taken into account in the Recommendations contained within this report.

Appendices

Appendix A – UKSPF Finance Position Oct 24

Appendix B – UKSPF EIA