

## Minutes of UK Prosperity Fund working group

Meeting Date: Friday, 18 August 2023, starting at 1.30pm  
Present: Councillor S Atkinson (Chair)

Councillors:

S Fletcher  
S Hore

L Jameson

In attendance: Director of Economic Development and Planning, Director of Community Resources, Senior Economic Development Officer and Director of Resources & Deputy Chief Executive

Also in attendance: Councillors

### 4 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Jim Rogerson.

### 5 RURAL ENGLAND PROSPERITY FUND

The Director of Economic Development and Planning informed the working group that the Rural Shared Prosperity Fund was an allocation of £75k to be spent by the end of March 2024 on rural projects.

The fund was in addition to the UKSPF allocation of £433k. Policy and Finance Committee had agreed the interventions on which the UKSPF funding would be spent, and the planned capital projects were; Castle Street Improvements totalling approximately £300k, and Clitheroe Market Improvements which were to go out to tender and be reported back to the working group.

A Rural Shared Prosperity Fund report was discussed at the Policy and Finance Committee meeting 20 June 2023 with a recommendation by Officers that the rural fund be allocated by a grant scheme. Members felt that the draft grant scheme was onerous and complicated and resolved that it be considered by the working group.

The central government guidance notes and prospectus had been shared with Members of the working group in advance of the meeting. It was highlighted at the meeting that as a local authority we would be responsible for:

- Managing local project calls for selecting projects in line with approved plans
- Approving applications
- Contacting successful applications
- Making payments
- Day to day monitoring

It was also noted that if the money was not used appropriately it would have to be returned to central government. Funds could also not be granted to applicants for which there was a duplication under any other funding schemes.

Under the proposed grant scheme the following organisations / groups with legal status in Tier 1 and Tier 2 villages could apply:

- parish councils
- registered charity/community association

- charitable incorporated organisation (CIO)
- community benefit society (Bencom)
- constituted community groups
- faith groups, where the activity is not promoting religion
- public sector organisations
- higher and further education institutions

The Voluntary Organisation Grants scheme had been used as a template in drafting the proposed scheme, as it had been a successful scheme which had been updated and improved over time. It protected the Council, and had all the checks and balances required, particularly in respect of potential fraud.

There was discussion at the meeting around when the Council would release the money to applicants. This is stated in the scheme to be upon completion, and on the production of the required documentation, however applications would be considered on an individual basis. It may be appropriate in some instances to consider releasing the money in stages, however this would clearly be set out in the decision letter.

In terms of the process, all applications would initially complete an expression of interest form, which would ensure that only suitable applications which met the criteria would be asked to complete the lengthier application form. The suitable applicants would then be invited to meet/ discuss their scheme with Officers, following which a decision would be made by the Working Group. The applicant would receive a decision letter which clearly set out the terms of the grant.

Members of the working group understood it was important to have all the procedures in place, but also to be mindful of timescale, and to ensure all the available money was utilised. The group also wanted recent issues with other grant schemes to be considered to avoid any future similar problems, however Officers confirmed that as part of process Officers would be liaising closely with applicants, and also adhering to agreed timescales and requirements. It was suggested that requirements and restrictions were clearly set out in the decision letter.

There was concern by Members around procurement requirements, namely obtaining multiple quotations for building works, and that organisations may struggle to obtain quotations from builders. Officers advised that such issues would be considered on an individual basis.

There was discussion around different ways of administering the process, including the working group having site of applications from an earlier stage, however Officers noted that they had learnt from past schemes that it worked best for Members to agree the criteria, and Officers to administer it. After reading the provided guidance notes, Members of the group felt that the grant criteria was very well done, and would ensure an appropriate level of filter to applications. Officers confirmed that all applications that met the criteria would be put forward.

It was noted that £50k was the maximum grant available but there was no minimum amount, and that the number of applications was impossible to predict however there were some existing projects that would be suitable which had been unsuccessful in applying for grants under the UKSPF scheme.

The Director of Community Services put forward an alternative suggestion to the group, whereby the money could be utilised to install electric vehicle charging points in villages. A feasibility study had been done through the UKSPF.

The Director of Economic Development & Planning would report the options to the next Policy and Finance Committee meeting of 12 September 2023.

## ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Director of Economic Development and Planning asked for the group's steer regarding the payment of a commuted sum in lieu of a Community Centre at Alston Grange Housing Development in Longridge.

Following discussion it was the Working Group's priority to see an events space and/or pump track. As the matter was a Planning decision a report would go to Planning & Development Committee to include what the money would be used for.

The meeting closed at 2.22pm

If you have any queries on these minutes please contact the committee clerk, Rebecca Tait .