

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

05 July 2022

Report of the Chief Executive

Part 1- Public

Executive Key Decisions

1 UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND

This report provides information about the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and seeks endorsement of the work undertaken to date to produce the Tonbridge and Malling Investment Plan in order to ultimately access the £1 million allocation that has been ring-fenced for the borough.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 In February 2022, the Government launched its Levelling Up White Paper which sets out how opportunity will be spread more evenly across the UK. Specifically, the White Paper seeks to:

- unleash the full potential of the private sector, boosting pay, productivity, innovation, and economic growth.
- improve public services, including giving everyone access to higher quality schools and training, improving people's health, particularly in disadvantaged communities, and increasing the supply and standard of housing; and
- regenerate town centres and high streets, tackling crime and anti-social behaviour to make streets safer, and ensuring everyone has access to culture.

1.1.2 Alongside the White Paper, Government has announced funding streams that support the aims and objectives of the Levelling Up agenda – most notably the Levelling Up Fund and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

1.2 UK Shared Prosperity Fund

1.2.1 In April 2022, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund prospectus was launched by Government. Across the UK, £2.6 billion of new funding for local investment was provisionally allocated to lower tier and unitary authorities (lead authorities) for the period up to March 2025, with £400 million allocated in 2022-23, and reaching £1.5 billion by 2024/5.

1.2.2 The South East was allocated a total of £74,702,315, which is considerably less than other parts of the UK, reflecting the strong role the region plays economically. For example, in comparison the South West was allocated just over £188 million. Indeed, most local authorities areas in Kent have been allocated the minimum amount of £1m for the period up to March 2025, with Canterbury receiving the largest allocation in Kent - £1.22 million.

1.2.3 The fund has three main investment priorities:

- Communities and Place (including visual improvements to town centres; litter and graffiti reduction; tackling anti-social behaviour and community projects).
- Supporting Local Business (including support for increasing footfall in town centres, developing visitor and heritage assets, and business growth and innovation support); and
- People and Skills (qualifications in skills gaps, addressing barriers to employment, helping with life skills and work experience opportunities).

1.2.4 The funding for the first two priorities will commence in 2022/23, while the 'People and Skills' priority will commence in 2024/25. The prospectus encourages lead authorities to work across boundaries and with different levels of local government to agree and commission provision across a wider geography, especially for employment and skills provision.

1.2.5 Lead authorities have been given the responsibility of developing local investment plans, recognising the role of local government and places in increasing pride or place and improving life chances. Lead authorities are required to submit their investment plans to Central Government by 01 August 2022 in order to receive their allocation of the fund. Lead authorities will then have the responsibility for managing the fund, assessing and approving applications, processing payments and day-to-day monitoring. In partnership with local stakeholders, they will determine the scale of intervention.

1.3 Tonbridge and Malling Investment Plan

1.3.1 As mentioned in 1.2.2, the Borough Council has been allocated £1m for the period up to March 2025. Government has stated that this funding will need to be split as follows:

- 2022/23 - £98,731
- 2023/24 - £197,462
- 2024/25 - £703,807

As such, the funding is heavily weighted towards the third year of the programme with limited delivery in Year 1. Funding for each financial year will be paid up front by Central Government, although this may be delayed if there are considerable issues with delivery in the previous year.

1.3.2 In order to access this allocation, the Investment Plan has to be developed in partnership with a local partnership group and signed off by both the lead authority and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). These plans comprise three aspects:

- Local Context – setting out the challenges and opportunities using local evidence
- Selection of Outcomes and Interventions – with lead authorities identifying the outcomes they want to achieve and the interventions they wish to prioritise using the evidence from the local context section.
- Delivery – setting out the approach to delivery and governance, expenditure and deliverables and capability and resource.

1.3.3 The draft Tonbridge and Malling Investment Plan is set out in Appendices 1-3. The following activities were undertaken in order to pull the plan together:

- Initial internal collation of potential projects covering communities and community safety, leisure services, technical services, economic regeneration, planning, property, housing.
- Reaching out to councillors and Town and Parish Councils for their views on important issues facing their local areas.
- Establishment of local partnership groups covering a range of public, private and community and voluntary sector representatives to share expertise and consider potential projects for the Investment Plan. There have been a couple of meetings with partners so far on 25 and 30 May 2022, as well as ongoing conversations.
- Dialogue with our Local MPs to ensure their support for the Investment Plan, with meetings taking place on 10 June 2022.

1.3.4 A central part to the development of the Investment Plan is the identification (along with supporting evidence) of the key challenges that the Borough Council faces. The challenges highlighted in the Investment Plan are:

- Communities and Place: inequality (with our deprived communities falling behind); a recent increase in anti-social behaviour, the plight of our high streets as they recover from the pandemic, and tackling environmental issues (carbon reduction and air quality issues).
- Local Business Investment: the overall performance of the economy in comparison to other areas equidistant from Central London, the large number of start-up businesses that do not survive beyond three years and the struggle for businesses to reduce their carbon footprint.

- People and Skills: the quantitative gap in a number of sectors, especially in the rural sector, the need for re-skilling the existing workforce and trying to break down barriers to employment amongst our residents that are furthest away from the workforce.

1.3.5 The borough Investment Plan identifies the key intervention areas that the plan is looking to address. These are:

E1 - Funding for improvements to town centres and high streets, including better accessibility for disabled people, including capital spend and running costs.

E3 - Creation of and improvements to local green spaces, community gardens, watercourses and embankments, along with incorporating natural features into wider public spaces.

E5 - Design and Management of the built and landscaped environment to 'design out crime'.

E6 - Support for local arts, cultural, heritage and creative activities.

E9 - Funding for impactful volunteering and/or social action projects to develop social and human capital in local places.

E10 - Funding for local sports facilities, tournaments, teams and leagues to bring people together.

E14 - Funding to support relevant feasibility studies.

E24 - Funding for new and improvements to existing training hubs, business support offers, 'incubators' and 'accelerators' for local enterprise which can support entrepreneurs and start-ups through the early stages of development and growth by offering a combination of services.

E29 - Supporting Decarbonisation and improving the natural environment whilst growing the local economy.

E33 - Employment support for economically inactive people.

E35 - Activities such as enrichment and volunteering to improve opportunities and promote wellbeing.

E39 - Green skills courses targeted around ensuring we have the skilled workforce to achieve the government's net zero and wider environmental ambitions.

1.3.6 Although not an essential requirement of Central Government when pulling the Investment Plan together at this stage, the borough Investment Plan also highlights a broad range of initiatives. This is because it is difficult to populate the spreadsheets setting out information on programme expenditure and indicators without having at least some project level detail. Further detail is provided in the

appendices, however, the projects that make up the plan are summarised below in Table 1:

Project	Description	Cost
Communities and Place		
Community Development Scheme	A grant scheme for voluntary and community sector partners and groups to bid for.	£165,269
Youth Provision	Youth provision in priority need areas (e.g., Snodland and East Malling). Youth provision could include commissioning organisations such as Olympia Boxing, Challenger Troop or Community Cycling to run regular activities for young people in these areas.	£50,000
Mobile CCTV	The purchase of two mobile CCTV cameras that can be placed in various locations across the borough as the need arises, enabling the Community Safety Partnership to respond proactively to anti-social behaviour reports from local community groups and the Parish Councils, especially in rural areas that have no coverage as things stand.	£35,000
Energy Efficient Car Parks	Upgrade car park lighting to LED lanterns and add extra lights where/if required. Reduction in energy consumption could pass on savings to residents, climate change benefits and improved environment/reduced crime due to better lighting.	£100,000
Green Bus Stops Pilot	Piloting two places in the borough (town centre or AQMA) to deliver green bus stops (green roofs consisting of grass and flowers).	£30,000
Shopfront Improvements and Tackling Vacancies Grant Scheme	Working with owners of prominent long term vacant and/or rundown premises to reduce the negative impact they have on their high streets, either through capital improvements to enable new or meanwhile uses, or through external works to improve their appearance. The Kent Rural Retail Initiative could be involved to provide support/expertise to retailers/owners.	£70,000
Tonbridge Town Centre Review	Specialist consultancy support to help progress the Council's aspirations and objectives for Tonbridge Town Centre.	£60,000
Digital Information Boards	Provision of digital information boards to promote local community facilities and activities. Information boards to be located in key locations including entrances to public open spaces, car parks across the Borough and to replace the roadside boards currently in place to enable multiple messages to be given in each location.	£120,000
Tonbridge Wayfinding	Delivery of new wayfinding art installations in Tonbridge Town Centre to improve the arrival	£29,731

	experience and town centre legibility, thereby improving dwell times.	
Carbon Descent Plans	The Council has declared and Climate Emergency and aspires to be carbon neutral by 2030. A Climate Change Strategy and associated Action Plan have been developed. In terms of the Council's own estate, our leisure centres are the largest carbon emitters and therefore the Council will need to undertake various works to plant and equipment and install renewable technologies to reduce their carbon footprint. This work begins with undertaking carbon descent plans at our two wet side facilities, Larkfield Leisure Centre and Tonbridge Swimming Pool.	£87,000
Local Business Investment		
West Kent Green Business Grant Scheme	A grant scheme to encourage local businesses to move towards zero carbon as per the aspirations of the Borough Climate Change Strategy. The scheme would include grant contributions of up to £5,000 towards interventions such as renewal energy sources, energy efficiency measures and business development support for green businesses.	£66,000
West Kent Business Support Programme	After many years of learning from providing business support across West Kent, this service will provide a co-ordinated programme of events and training, along with a start-up mentoring service that also offers seed funding grants (of up to £500) to support	£54,500
People and Skills		
Community Carbon Literacy Programme	A grant of £50 to contribute towards carbon literacy training for initially 50 individuals from local Parish Councils, Community Groups, Schools (course costs £99). Carbon literacy training to be provided by the Carbon Literacy Project through their online course: Carbon Literacy for Interested Organisations.	£12,500
West Kent Life Skills Project (supporting people furthest from employment)	An initiative to provide support along with life skills and basic skills training to local residents that are furthest away from the workplace. The ultimate aim will be to help participants get closer to employability rather than necessarily getting them directly into paid employment.	£50,000
West Kent Volunteering and Enrichment Project	Linked to the above project there will also be a small programme of volunteering and enrichment activities for people furthest from the workplace in order to give them additional support and experience that builds confidence.	£10,000

Green Retrofit Skills Programme	Initiative to support the transition to a greener local economy, with particular focus on supporting people that are 50+ years old to retrain and gain new skills.	£60,000
Total		£1,000,000

Table 1: Proposed Investment Plan Projects.

1.3.7 Whilst many of the projects covering 2022/23 and 2023/24 have more detail, the projects identified for 2024/25 are currently only in outline and further detail will be worked up as the programme advances.

1.3.8 Overall, the projects fit well under the three main national priority areas (and associated interventions) set out by UK Shared Prosperity Fund prospectus, but there are also some clear local themes that emerge from the Investment Plan. These are:

- Supporting our Town Centres
- Supporting Carbon Reduction and Improving Environmental Well-Being
- Supporting our Local Communities and Businesses

1.3.7 The projects in the Investment Plan will lever in funding from other sources, including other public funding such as the Business Rates Retention Pilot as well as match funding from private businesses and community groups. This leverage is expected to exceed £350,000 over the course of the three years. In addition, none of these projects are designed to have unbudgeted ongoing costs beyond 2024/25, and indeed in some instances will directly contribute towards reducing future costs.

1.4 Next Steps:

1.4.1 The window for submitting investment plans is 30 June to 01 August 2022, and as such the exercise of pulling together the investment plan has been undertaken at speed. Despite this, there has been every effort to pull together a plan that benefits the borough and meets the requirements of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

1.4.2 It is proposed that the Investment Plan be submitted to DLUHC in July 2022, and should there be any small changes or amendments between now and the submission date, that these are undertaken in consultation with the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council.

1.4.3 DLUHC has announced that the first investment plans will be approved from October 2022 onwards, at which point it is anticipated that first payments will be made to lead local authorities.

1.4.4 Further guidance will be published in Summer 2022 setting out monitoring benefits and evaluation, assurance, subsidy control, branding and publicity.

1.5 Legal Implications

- 1.5.1 Cabinet will be aware of the duties upon the Council under s.149 Equality Act 2010 (the “Public Sector Equality Duty”). The investment plan specifically addresses how the plan seeks to respond to the Public Sector Equality Duty.
- 1.5.2 Following the end of EU-Exit transitional arrangements on state aid, the granting of public subsidies to private enterprise is now regulated by the Trade and Cooperation Agreement¹. Importantly, the “de minimis” threshold has been raised to £340,000 over a three-year period. It is also arguable that “purely internal” subsidy will be permitted. It is understood that further guidance on subsidy control in relation to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund is due to be issued by central government, and it will be important to ensure, as the investment plan is implemented, that these subsidy control rules are understood and followed before any grant payments are made.

1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.6.1 A successful Investment Plan would unlock £1,000,000 of UK Shared Prosperity Funding, comprising both capital and revenue, over the period up to March 2025. The annual funding for the first year will be paid up front once the Investment Plan is approved, and funding will be provided upfront for future years, although payment could be delayed if there are issues with delivery in the previous year.
- 1.6.2 As stated in the body of the report, none of the projects set out in the Investment Plan will have ongoing costs beyond 2024/25 that will not be able to be met through existing budgets, and indeed in some instances will directly contribute towards reducing future costs.
- 1.6.3 Whilst there is no requirement for match funding, DLUHC has requested that any indicative match funding be set out in the Investment Plan in order to demonstrate leverage. This indicative match funding amounts to just over £350,000 and derives exclusively from Business Rates Retention Pilot, Business Rates Pool and Section 106 funding.

1.7 Risk Assessment

- 1.7.1 Reputational risk should the programme of initiatives not be delivered on time and to budget.

1.8 Policy Considerations

- 1.8.1 Climate Change
- 1.8.2 Community

¹ s.29 European Union (Future Relationship) Act 2020

1.8.3 Economic Regeneration

1.8.4 Planning Policy

1.7 Recommendations

1.7.1 That the Tonbridge and Malling UKSPF Investment Plan **BE ENDORSED**.

1.7.2 That delegated authority **BE GRANTED** to the Chief Executive in liaison with the Leader of the Council to approve any necessary minor changes to the Tonbridge and Malling Investment Plan prior to submission, for the purpose of presentation or improving clarity.

Background papers:

Nil

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