

EX23. UK Government Levelling Up Fund, Community Renewal Fund and Community Ownership Fund

The Executive considered a report by the Acting Director of Development Services which provided an update on three recently launched funds from the UK government – the Levelling Up Fund, the UK Community Renewal Fund and the Community Ownership Fund. The report outlined the funding opportunities presented and sought agreement that submissions for funding support be made by the Council.

The UK Government had committed an initial £4 billion for the Levelling Up Fund for England over the next four years and set aside at least £800million for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The funding was targeted towards places with the most significant need, as measured by an index taking into account the following characteristics:-

- need for economic recovery and growth;
- need for improved transport connectivity, and
- need for regeneration.

Using the index, places were placed into category 1, 2, or 3, with category 1 representing places with the highest levels of identified need including Falkirk. Preference would be given to bids from higher priority areas in category 1, the bandings did not represent eligibility criteria, nor the amount or number of bids a place could submit. The priorities were therefore well matched to projects identified within the Falkirk & Grangemouth Investment Zone and Tax Incremental Financing (TIF) package.

It was proposed that bids which sought up to £20m of capital funds be submitted in respect of the area's two most advanced infrastructure projects: Round 1 – Westfield Bridge and infrastructure works at A904/Westfield roundabout; and Round 2 – Avon Gorge Bridge infrastructure.

The UK government was providing an additional £220 million funding through the UK Community Renewal Fund to help local areas prepare for the launch of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) in 2022 helping to inform the design of future UKSPF programmes. The investment priorities of the fund were to support people and communities most in need across the UK to pilot programmes and new approaches and would invest in skills, community and place, local business, and supporting people into employment.

The Falkirk area was identified by the UK Government as one of the 100 priority places for the Community Renewal Fund, however being listed as a priority place did not guarantee funding. Applications were invited from all private, public, third sector and community organisations able to deliver innovative responses to local challenges and local need in the Falkirk Council area. Bids may include, but were not limited to:-

- work-based training
- retraining, upskilling or reskilling members of the workforce
- promoting the advancement of digital skills and inclusion

- supporting entrepreneurs and helping businesses with potential to create more job
- opportunities for current employees or take on new employees
- encouraging businesses to develop their innovation potential
- supporting decarbonisation measures
- exploring opportunity for promoting culture-led regeneration and community development
- feasibility studies for delivering net-zero and local energy projects
- improving green spaces and preserving important local assets
- promoting rural connectivity

The UK government had launched a new £150 million Community Ownership Fund to help ensure that communities could support and continue benefiting from the local facilities, community assets and amenities most important to them. From summer 2021, community groups would be able to bid for up to £250,000 matched-funding to help them buy or take over local community assets at risk of being lost, to run as community-owned businesses. In exceptional cases, up to £1 million matched-funding would be available to help establish a community-owned sports club or help buy a sports grounds at risk of being lost without community intervention.

Communities and stakeholders in the Falkirk area would be kept updated on the fund as more information became available, with regard to delivery and administration, the bid process and key dates. The fund may have direct implications for supporting the outcomes of the Council's Strategic Property Review.

Councillor Meiklejohn, seconded by Councillor Alexander, moved that the Executive:-

- (1) notes the launch by UK government of three significant new funds for local authorities across the UK and opportunities they presented to the Council and its communities;
- (2) agrees that officers progress opportunities and submit eligible bids to the Levelling Up Fund for:-
 - (i) Round 1 – the Westfield bridge and associated infrastructure upgrade to the A904, and
 - (ii) Round 2 – Avon Gorge (A901) and associated infrastructure (joint with West Lothian Council);
- (3) notes the timescales by which the Council was required to establish the UK Community Renewal Fund and agreed that a package of proposals seeking £3m of revenue support in 2021-22 be submitted to UK Government for approval;
- (4) notes the award of £125,000 of advance funding for delivery of the Levelling Up Fund and £20,000 for the Community Renewal Fund and agreed that the funds were committed toward delivery of the works necessary to support the delivery of the schemes;

- (5) notes that further information was to be provided by the UK Government in respect of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the Community Ownership Fund later in 2021, and
- (6) agrees that further reports be supplied to the Executive on delivery of these funds.

As an amendment, Councillor Bissett moved, as an addition to the motion, a further clause, that the Executive requests that the Avon Gorge was recognised as a priority and that work commenced to ensure that the project was best placed to succeed in round 2.

Councillor Meiklejohn as the mover of the motion, with the consent of Councillor Alexander as her seconder, agreed to amend the terms of the motion to incorporate the terms of the amendment.

Decision

The Executive:-

- (1) **noted the launch by UK government of three significant new funds for local authorities across the UK and opportunities they presented to the Council and its communities;**
- (2) **agreed that officers progress opportunities and submit eligible bids to the Levelling Up Fund for:-**
 - (i) **Round 1 – the Westfield bridge and associated infrastructure upgrade to the A904, and**
 - (ii) **Round 2 – Avon Gorge (A901) and associated infrastructure (joint with West Lothian Council);**

requested that the Avon Gorge was recognised as a priority and that work commenced to ensure that the project was best placed to succeed in round 2.

- (3) **noted the timescales by which the Council was required to establish the UK Community Renewal Fund and agreed that a package of proposals seeking £3m of revenue support in 2021-22 be submitted to UK Government for approval;**
- (4) **noted the award of £125,000 of advance funding for delivery of the Levelling Up Fund and £20,000 for the Community Renewal Fund and agreed that the funds were committed toward delivery of the works necessary to support the delivery of the schemes;**
- (5) **noted that further information was to be provided by the UK Government in respect of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the Community Ownership Fund later in 2021, and**

- (6) agreed that further reports be supplied to the Executive on delivery of these funds.**