

Friday 26 May 2023

Report Title:	UK Shared Prosperity Fund - Wirral High Streets: Local Capacity Building Support
Report of:	Principal Economic Development Lead

REPORT SUMMARY

Town centre regeneration, transport improvements and the creation of quality places is a long-standing priority for the Council and is reflected in the Wirral Plan 2021-2026. The proposals contained in this report directly support the following key themes within the Wirral Plan:

- A thriving and inclusive economy, creating jobs and opportunities for all;
- A clean-energy, sustainable borough, leading the way in tackling the environment crisis;
- Safe and pleasant communities that our residents are proud of; and
- Healthy and active lives for all, with the right care, at the right time.

This report seeks approval to progress with the procurement of a suitably qualified organisation to provide dedicated support to high street stakeholders in Liscard Town Centre and Birkenhead Town Centre, to formalise or further develop a high street partnership for the local area and co-design with partners, local businesses and community organisations/groups, a locally owned and driven action plan.

Aligned to this commission is a ringfenced grant budget available via the UK Shared Prosperity Fund which could support the delivery of local interventions that are identified through the co-designed action plans.

This matter affects the wards of Birkenhead and Tranmere, Liscard and Seacombe.

RECOMMENDATION

The Director of Regeneration & Place is recommended to approve the commencement of the procurement exercise to seek a suitably qualified organisation to provide dedicated support to high street stakeholders in Liscard and Birkenhead Town Centres based on the specification set out at paragraph 3.12 – 3.17 of this report and in accordance with the Most Economically Advantageous Tender evaluation criteria.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 To support the agreed UK Shared Prosperity Fund Investment Plan priority to deliver a range of interventions to boost town centre activity and raise the profile of high street businesses.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 Providing support to a larger number of high streets has been considered. Given the limited amount of funding available and the retail hierarchy set out in the Wirral draft Local Plan, it is considered that targeting Birkenhead Town Centre and Liscard Town Centre would provide maximum benefit with the funding available. The Council is intending to launch a marketing campaign later in 2023 targeting local high street businesses across the Borough as part of the UKSPF programme.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) Investment Plan

- 3.1 The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) is providing new funding for local investment to help 'level up' areas of the UK. Wirral Council's allocation will be administered by the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA). The Council's approved [UKSPF Phase 1 Investment Plan](#) sets out a priority to deliver a range of interventions to boost town centre activity and raise the profile of high street businesses. This includes dedicated town centre support to build capacity to secure the centres' long-term future. The approved Investment Plan includes an allocation of £297,581 to deliver the UKSPF town centre priorities.
- 3.2 In addition to a Borough-wide 'shop local', campaign and a young market traders activity programme, the proposal within this report is to commission a suitably qualified organisation to provide dedicated support to high street stakeholders in Liscard Town Centre and Birkenhead Town Centre and its immediate surrounding shopping streets up to March 2025.

Policy Context

- 3.3 The Liverpool City Region Combined Authority's Plan for Prosperity sets out a priority to revitalise town centres and community hubs so that they are renewed focal points for social infrastructure, communities, entrepreneurs, and businesses. The Plan also seeks to build on the recommendations of the Liverpool City Region Town Centres Commission, launched in 2020 by the Metro Mayor, to create a new vision for town centres in the City Region, identifying ways to secure their long-term prosperity and stability, and achieve social and economic transformative change for their communities, particularly important given the structural challenges facing the City Region's town centres.
- 3.4 The Wirral Economic Strategy 2021 – 2026 sets out the Council's priorities for inclusive economic growth. The Strategy identifies the current challenges and opportunities and sets out the building blocks to secure inclusive growth in the long term, with a focus on ensuring that local residents and businesses benefit. The

Strategy also recognises the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Wirral's economy and sets out how resilience can be supported going forward.

- 3.5 The Strategy identifies that many of our centres are facing profound challenges due to the changing role of retail, the pandemic and competition from other locations. It sets out a need to build on the existing individuality of centres, ensuring centres are a focus/hub for their communities, and extend the 'dwell time' and spend of people visiting town centres.

Selection of Locations for Support

- 3.6 The Wirral Local Plan 2021-2037 is at an advanced stage. The Council has endorsed the Wirral Local Plan – Submission Draft as a material consideration to be used in the determination of planning applications, with appropriate weight given in accordance with paragraph 48 of the National Planning Policy Framework. The Local Plan was submitted to the Secretary of State for independent examination in October 2022 and the first hearings into the Local Plan commenced in April 2023.
- 3.7 Policy WS 11.2 of the Local Plan sets out the retail hierarchy within the Borough, designating Birkenhead Town Centre as the Sub-Regional Centre (TC-SA2.1), and Heswall (TC-SA7.1), Liscard (TC-SA1.1), Moreton (TC-SA5.1) and West Kirby (TC-SA6.1) as Town Centres, to provide the main focus for development and investment in shops, services, leisure and community facilities outside Birkenhead.
- 3.8 The core vision and strategy of the Local Plan is to regenerate the urban areas in and around Birkenhead and to facilitate the wider regeneration programme for the 'Left Bank' of the River Mersey stretching from New Brighton to Bromborough, underpinned by the draft Birkenhead 2040 Framework which has been endorsed as the [Council's interim regeneration strategy for Birkenhead](#).
- 3.9 The Local Plan also sets out a Strategic Objective to enable Birkenhead and the Borough's other town, district and local centres to adapt to changing shopping patterns in order to create a vibrant mixed-use focus for each community.
- 3.10 The Council's UKSPF Phase 1 Investment Plan sets out a focus on town centre capacity support to the Council's regeneration priority areas. Given the position of Birkenhead and Liscard in the Local Plan Retail Hierarchy and within Left Bank, it is considered that focusing capacity support in these locations would provide the greatest impact with the funding available.
- 3.11 In Liscard Town Centre a programme of investment through the Liverpool City Region Mayoral Town Centre Fund was delivered by the Council between January 2020 to March 2022. Following on from this investment, during 2022, Liscard Town Centre received further support through the High Streets Task Force, an initiative run by the Institute of Place Management on behalf of Government. The outcome of the support was a report to the Council in September 2022 setting out recommended next steps for the town centre, which included the establishment of a Town Centre Partnership. The Council has subsequently commissioned IntoPlaces to provide a 6-month period of support up to July 2023. At the time of writing, it is expected that a new partnership will have been established and launched by July 2023 and that an associated initial action plan will also have been co-produced with local stakeholders.

High Street Capacity Support Commission Scope

- 3.12 Each town centre is at a different stage of partnership development and the appointed supplier will be expected to consider the most effective way of delivering on the requirements for each centre.
- 3.13 For Liscard, the appointed supplier will be expected to build on the IntoPlaces support, reviewing and working with the established partnership/group to further develop and provide support to take the existing structure forward. This may include work to formalise the partnership, embed and advise on appropriate constituted governance and provide expert advice and guidance to ensure its continued success.
- 3.14 For Birkenhead, the supplier will be expected to map out relevant stakeholders, undertake grass roots engagement and provide support to local traders who may wish to develop and formalise a group or partnership where appropriate, along with appropriate capacity building activities to ensure its future independent sustainability and continuation.
- 3.15 The appointed supplier will also be expected to co-design with partners, local businesses and community organisations/groups, a locally owned and driven action plan (with short and long-term aspirations) to address and overcome key local level issues and make the most of new opportunities.
- 3.16 The action plan(s) may involve, but would not be limited to, a programme of high street events, developing place branding and destination marketing, instigating local campaigns to increase footfall, identifying public realm and environmental improvements and working with other local services and partners to address crime and anti-social behaviour issues affecting the high street offer.
- 3.17 Aligned to this commission will be a ringfenced grant budget available via the UK Shared Prosperity Fund which will be made available to kickstart the delivery of local interventions that are identified through the aforementioned local action planning process. The grant budget currently stands at £43,145 revenue funding and £69,436 capital funding.
- 3.18 The Council is intending to procure a supplier via an open procurement process, in accordance with the Most Economically Advantageous Tender evaluation criteria.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 A revenue allocation of £95,000 is available for the commission via the UKSPF Phase 1 allocation. A Grant Funding Agreement is in place between the Council and the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority regarding the UKSPF Phase 1 allocation. Match funding is not a requirement of the programme.
- 4.2 Any activities identified through the action plans to be developed will be funded via the UKSPF aligned town centre grant budget or via alternative external funding. The appointed supplier will be required to work with stakeholders to identify other external sources of funding to provide additionality and support future sustainability. The UKSPF aligned town centre grant budget stands at £43,145

revenue funding and £69,436 capital funding, which needs to be defrayed by 31 March 2025.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 At its meeting on 7 December 2022, Economy, Regeneration & Housing Committee endorsed the submission of Wirral Council's Phase 1 Investment Plan to the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority and granted delegated authority to the Director of Regeneration & Place to commence delivery of the UKSPF Phase 1 programme in line with the grant funding agreement and change control process (Minute 37 refers).
- 5.2 The Council has a legally-binding grant funding agreement in place with the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority regarding delivery of the UKSPF Phase 1 Programme. DLUHC has provided a UKSPF Grant Determination letter to the LCRCA for 2022/23 with indicative allocations for subsequent years, accompanied by a non-legally binding Memorandum of Understanding and Additional Information guidance documents. In order to protect against the highly unlikely event that the allocation is reduced by DLUHC, it is proposed that a break clause is included in the contract, to provide the Council with the ability to terminate and/or reduce the scope of the service being provided following a period of notice.
- 5.3 Dispersal of grant funding to third parties from the ringfenced support budget in support of delivery of local interventions will be in accordance with the UK Subsidy Control regime and UK Shared Prosperity Fund requirements.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 The Council's UKSPF programme will be managed by existing staff from within the Council's Regeneration Service supported by finance, legal and the Regeneration Programme Management Office.
- 6.2 The partnerships/groups may raise matters relating to Council services outside of the Department of Regeneration & Place, for example anti-social behaviour and parking, which may require input from colleagues in other departments.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 Consideration has been given to potential risks and, where possible, steps have been put in place to minimise risk. With regard to contract performance, the Council has adopted effective contract management and monitoring to minimise the risk of poor performance, and a series of performance indicators will be included as part of the contract.
- 7.2 Given that some of the actions identified through this process may be dependent on resource availability in other Council departments, there is a risk that some actions will not be delivered within the timescales. The appointed supplier will be required to work with stakeholders to ensure actions are realistic and achievable, in consultation with Council leads.
- 7.3 There is also a risk that the partnership(s) may struggle to continue beyond the funded period of support, however, the appointed supplier will be required to produce

a plan/strategy with the partnership/group(s) which sets out an approach to ensure future sustainability.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

8.1 Extensive consultation took place during 2022 on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority's UKSPF Phase 1 Investment Plan, including the proposed focus on supporting town centre businesses. In respect of Wirral's approved UKSPF Phase 1 Investment Plan, Council Officers have convened a UKSPF Town Centre Programme Group who has been engaged and consulted during the preparation of the commissioning specification brief, with ongoing engagement with the Council's Procurement team.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The potential impact of the UKSPF has been reviewed with regard to equality and links to the existing Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) conducted for Wirral's Economic Strategy and no material amendments have been made.

9.2 Whilst there are no equality implications arising from this report, the associated actions arising from the delivery may need to assess any equality issues and mitigate any negative impact that may emerge. Any associated EIA's will be done at the earliest possible stage.

A copy of the EIA for Wirral's Economic Strategy can be viewed at:

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impactassessments/equality-impact-assessments-2021-0#overlay-context=communitiesand-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments/equality-impact-assessments2021>

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The evaluation criteria for this contract will include an assessment of social value of the Council's strategic objectives of a thriving, healthy, accessible, safe and attractive borough and bids will be evaluated in line with this consideration.

10.2 Interventions and activities identified through the local action planning process may be delivered with the support of UKSPF capacity funding. Such interventions may relate to environmental improvement initiatives, and the merits of any proposals will be considered to ensure the potential for increasing biodiversity, green infrastructure and attractiveness within the high street public realm. The content and recommendations contained within this report are therefore expected to reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases where possible.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

11.1 Community Wealth Building reorganises local economies to be fairer and stops wealth flowing out of communities. Striving for a prosperous and inclusive economy where local people can get good jobs and achieve their aspirations, the Council aims to create an economy that benefits all of our residents and one which keeps money

within Wirral. The Council's Community Wealth Building Strategy is a key part of how this is achieved and makes a major contribution to improving the economic, social and health outcomes of the borough.

- 11.2 The projects within the UKSPF Phase 1 programme will support the revitalisation of the town centres and the empowerment of local stakeholders. It is expected that the programme will help to ensure that more wealth is invested and stays within our Borough.

REPORT AUTHOR:

Name: Hannah Austin

Principal Economic Development Lead

Email: hannahaustin@wirral.gov.uk

APPENDICES

N/A

BACKGROUND PAPERS

UK Shared Prosperity Fund: Wirral Council Phase 1 Investment Plan (December 2022)
High Street Task Force – Expert Solution Report for Liscard (September 2022)

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
UK Shared Prosperity Fund, Economy, Regeneration & Housing Committee	7 December 2022