

Warrington UKSPF Local Partnership

25<sup>th</sup> April 2023

**In Attendance:**

Eleanor Blackburn (EB)	(Chair) Warrington Borough Council (Officer)
Cllr Janet Henshaw (JH)	Warrington Borough Council (Member)
Alison Cullen (AC)	Warrington Voluntary Action
Dave Thompson (DT)	Warrington Disability Partnership
Nichola Newton (NN)	Warrington and Vale Royal College
Lucy Gardner (LG)	Warrington and Halton Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
Leah Biddle (LB)	Culture Warrington
Andrea Morley (AM)	Warrington Business Improvement District (BID)
Aimee Ruddy (AR)	Warrington Chamber of Commerce
Sarah Williams (SW)	Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)
Pat Jackson (PJ)	Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)
Joanne Higginbottom (JH)	Department for Work and Pensions
Tim Smith (TS)	Warrington Borough Council

**Apologies:**

Cllr Cathy Mitchell (CM)	Warrington Borough Council (Member)
Stephen Fitzsimons (SF)	Warrington Chamber of Commerce
Colin Billingsley (CB)	Department for Work and Pensions
Martin Wood (MW)	DLUHC – Cities and Local Growth Unit
Ellie Cox (EC)	DLUHC – Cities and Local Growth Unit

**Notes and Actions**

1 [Welcome and Introductions](#)

EB welcomed everybody to the meeting and members introduced themselves.

## 2 UKSPF Background

TS presented a summary of the Warrington UKSPF programme. UKSPF is the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. This is the successor programme to European funding. Warrington has an allocation of c. £6.5m for the current programme lifetime, running until March 2025. Government is phasing in that money, with an indicative profile of:

Year 1 (2022/23): 12%

Year 2 (2023/24): 24%

Year 3 (2024/25): 64%

However, as grant confirmation letters and approval of Investment Plans were only issued to local authorities in December 2022, Government has recognised that not much Year 1 spend is likely to have been achieved, and has therefore allowed 100% of Year 1 underspend to be rolled forward into Year 2, subject to confirmation of plans to spend all Year 1 and 2 funding by March 2024.

The Investment Plan, informed by stakeholder feedback in summer 2022, has a breakdown of funding per Investment Priority as roughly:

- Communities and Place: 55%
- Supporting Local Business: 30%
- People and Skills: 15%

Under each Investment Priority are individual Interventions (E numbers) with specific budget allocations and outputs/outcomes targets against them. However, Government has recently allowed flexibility for moving between E numbers and so these allocations and targets will likely change over the programme lifetime to reflect emerging over and under demand.

DT asked about money spent so far. TS clarified that the figures above were the Government's intended profiles for phasing in the funding, but nothing had actually been spent in Warrington to date, apart from a small amount of admin costs (up to 4% of the programme total is allowed).

JH asked about the process for approving projects. EB explained that there is a Warrington Borough Council steering group which will perform that role. That group considers project proposals and makes recommendations for approval, if appropriate, and decisions are confirmed by Warrington Borough Council's Senior Leadership Team (SLT).

SW asked about the People and Skills allocation, and a Government restriction that for Years 1 and 2 that area of funding could only be used for voluntary sector led European funded projects due to close. EB reported that the restriction had been lifted, but only very recently. Had we known that at the time of compiling our Investment Plan, we might have had a higher allocation in People and Skills. However, we do have some flexibility to move budget around if needed.

## 3 Terms of Reference

TS presented a draft Terms of Reference.

The Warrington UKSPF Local Partnership ("the Partnership") will serve as an advisory function to Warrington Borough Council, which is the "Lead Local Authority". It will act as a "critical friend", supporting strong governance by providing external scrutiny.

The Partnership will be established as a dedicated sub-group, reporting to the Warrington Town Board. It will meet monthly initially and then as required (at least quarterly).

Detailed functions will include:

- supporting the development and finalisation of Investment Plans
- providing ongoing advice on strategic fit, local priorities, challenges, needs and opportunities
- informing spending plans, procurement specifications and advising on budget allocations
- providing information on other current and forthcoming activities in the area to help ensure a holistic approach
- providing a forum through which Warrington UKSPF information can be communicated
- providing advice, guidance and support for Warrington Borough Council

The Terms of Reference were agreed by the Partnership.

## 4 6 Monthly Report

TS explained that the first 6 Monthly Report, covering the period up to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023, has to be submitted to Government by 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2023. This includes a narrative section on progress so far and how we intend to make sure that we can spend our Year 1 and Year 2 allocations by March 2024, and spreadsheets regarding outputs/outcomes and budget allocations. The document is quite unwieldy, and so TS had created a separate spreadsheet to make things easier to follow:

### **UKSPF updated financial breakdown**

TS reminded the group about the flexibility to move budget allocations and outputs/outcomes targets between Interventions (E numbers). On that basis, TS had created “activity themes”, some including multiple E numbers with obvious commonality between them. That gave higher amounts of funding and took away some of the restrictions if we had tried to adhere strictly to the figures submitted in our original Investment Plan. The “activity themes” are:

- environment and transport
- arts and culture
- volunteering / community involvement
- digital infrastructure
- feasibility studies
- town centre / visitor economy
- business support
- decarbonisation
- employment growth
- SMART digital technology
- people and skills

NN commented that it would have been good to have more budget allocation in the People and Skills area, and also that it would be good to use UKSPF to provide revenue streams to support other investments, e.g. Town Deal projects. EB replied that the allocation was set at a time when the Government restriction on its usage was in place. TS commented that, as well as linkages, to the Town Deal, UKSPF can also be used to address the findings of the current Skills Commission work and DWP’s Place Based Plans.

## **Approved projects**

TS reported that some projects had recently been approved. There had been a Council exercise to try and get some momentum and, ideally, some Year 1 (2022/23) delivery and spend, although that had ultimately not been achievable. Project proposal forms, including sections on description, fit, funding and deliverability, had been completed, then considered by the steering group and confirmed as approved by WBC SLT.

## **Town Centre Wardens**

Recruitment of new officers, working at least in pairs, to tackle anti-social behaviour and improve the look of the town centre.

## **Cultural Activities and Events**

A programme for 2023/24 of events, performances, exhibitions and installations across Warrington.

## **Connected Communities**

Connecting people and places to support overall health and wellbeing, including expanding Talking Points into more communities, and grants and infrastructure to support community development and volunteering.

## **Care Leavers Academy**

Training and life-skills support for care leavers, including confidence building, employability, basic Maths and English, budgeting, managing a home, food and healthy eating etc.

## **Connect Yourself**

Training and life-skills support for young people identified as SEND (special educational needs and disability) who have finished, or are transitioning from, statutory education services.

## **Torus / New Leaf Partnership**

Funding to continue a voluntary sector led European funded project about to close, in order to avoid a gap in provision to support economically inactive people with one-to-one support and group training courses to improve their employability and help with wider lifestyle issues such as mental health, family budgeting and digital inclusion.

Partnership members requested that they get more information and involvement as future projects are being developed. EB and TS will make sure that the Partnership is able to input to the process as projects and/or procurement specifications are brought forward, and will broker meetings between Partnership members and project deliverers once projects go live.

NN was keen to make sure that skills aspects of various projects, such as apprenticeship opportunities, are maximised. LG was interested in the health and wellbeing potential, particularly in cultural activities and events. PJ pointed out the link with DWP's Place Based Plans, in which care leavers is an identified priority.

## 5 Next Steps

TS presented an intended timeline for bringing forward project proposals and procurement specifications in the next two quarters. This is based on the “activity themes” referred to earlier. EB reminded group members that their role is to bring local expertise and knowledge to help design appropriate provision and to identify and emphasise any emerging issues or local priorities that might not feature on the current list.

LG felt that members need to understand the process for bringing ideas forward and scoping future projects. EB will discuss with TS scoping future delivery, output gaps, workshops, procurement specs etc.

## 6 Any Other Business

PJ reported that Partnership Based Plans are now being developed as a follow-up to DWP’s Place Based Plans. It will be beneficial for our UKSPF intentions to align with that. PJ will share the relevant documents.

## 7 Schedule of Future Meetings

It was agreed that the Partnership should meet monthly initially, and have face-to-face meetings if possible. TS will amend the Terms of Reference accordingly.