

Warrington UKSPF Local Partnership

27th June 2023

In Attendance:

Eleanor Blackburn (EB)	(Chair) Warrington Borough Council (Officer)
Cllr Cathy Mitchell (CM)	Warrington Borough Council (Member)
Andrea Morley (AM)	Warrington Business Improvement District (BID)
Susan Savage (SS)	Department for Work and Pensions
Sarah Williams (SW)	Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)
Nichola Newton (NN)	Warrington and Vale Royal College
Rebecca Anderson-Moss (RAM)	Warrington and Vale Royal College
Locklynne Hall (LH)	LiveWire
Stephen Fitzsimons (SF)	Warrington Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Derek Jones (DJ)	Warrington Disability Partnership
Lucy Gardner (LG)	Warrington and Halton Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
Alison Cullen (AC)	Warrington Voluntary Action
Tim Smith (TS)	Warrington Borough Council

Apologies:

Colin Billingsley (CB)	Department for Work and Pensions
Joanne Higginbottom (JH)	Department for Work and Pensions
Leah Biddle (LB)	Culture Warrington
Martin Wood (MW)	DLUHC – Cities and Local Growth Unit
Ellie Cox (EC)	DLUHC – Cities and Local Growth Unit

Declarations of Interest:

Stephen Fitzsimons (SF)	potential bidder under Business Support
Nichola Newton (NN)	potential bidder under People and Skills, and Multiply
Rebecca Anderson-Moss (RAM)	potential bidder under People and Skills, and Multiply
Derek Jones (DJ)	current deliverer under Multiply
Alison Cullen (AC)	current deliverer under Multiply
Eleanor Blackburn (EB)	potential deliverer under Employer Engagement

1 Welcome and Introductions

EB welcomed everybody to the meeting and members introduced themselves.

2 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 25th April 2023, were accepted as a true record. TS will arrange for them to be published on the Council's UKSPF website page.

TS reported that the six-monthly report to Government had been returned with a minor amendment needed, which had been completed and the Council was awaiting approval of the Year 2 Investment Plan.

3 Terms of Reference for the group and ongoing membership

TS confirmed that he had changed the frequency of meetings to monthly at first then quarterly when requested by members. Otherwise, the Terms of Reference were as agreed at the previous meeting.

A Deputy Chair is needed for the group and members were requested to send any nominations to TS.

4 UKSPF Financial and Outputs/Outcomes Position (June 2023)

TS presented a spreadsheet showing an updated financial profile, including allocations against each "activity theme" together with figures for approved projects, procurement specs written, and proposals expected. TS also presented a spreadsheet showing expected outputs and outcomes to be achieved by approved projects, against programme targets. A performance management framework, also including commentary for each project, was being developed using the Power BI tool.

NN and RAM asked about how to get involved, future bidding rounds, timescales etc. LG asked how people could find out about the programme and put forward project proposals.

TS explained that at this stage it was not the intention to have set bidding rounds and deadline dates. Meetings were frequent enough that the Council had been able to deal with proposals as and when they came in. It was desirable to avoid a situation of lots of unexpected bids competing with each other, and preferable to do things by consensus – identify, discuss, scope, commission. A multi-sector, multi-partner workshop had been scheduled for 10th July 2023 to raise awareness of the programme, refresh the key priorities, if appropriate, and explain how to get involved.

5 Consideration of Procurement Specs / Project Proposals

Business Support

TS presented a draft procurement specification for a general business support package for Warrington, similar to services that had been available previously through European funding and or the LEP's Growth Hub.

SF felt that this was an exciting opportunity for Warrington businesses, particularly financial support and business grants.

EB asked about expectations of partnership working, a transparent structure for managing a business grants programme, and how the support would be advertised and communicated.

Members agreed that it would be best to not be too prescriptive in the specification, but to let bidders describe their own intentions. TS would therefore make sure that those issues were included in the scoring questions.

Subject to those issues being included, the group supported the specification.

Decarbonisation

TS presented a draft procurement specification for a package of decarbonisation business support activity in Warrington.

SF confirmed that low carbon is a key emerging sector, both nationally and locally, and that green skills is a cross cutting requirement across a range of business support and skills activity.

LG reported that the NHS has a green and sustainability group. She would raise awareness to help encourage potential bidders, and broker an introduction with the NHS lead in this area.

RAM updated that Warrington and Vale Royal College is currently working on a bid under the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) which includes green skills training.

EB was concerned that this specification must be complementary to other similar activity under LSIP and Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester's plans under UKSPF.

TS would discuss this with relevant stakeholders, as above, before progressing with a procurement exercise.

Employer Engagement

TS presented a draft project proposal with four strands of activity

- support to help employers create opportunities for priority groups
- wage subsidies for employers taking on priority group participants
- support to help employers create and recruit to apprenticeship opportunities, and to share unspent Apprenticeship Levy monies in their local area / supply chain

- address forthcoming recommendations of the Warrington Skills Commission

SF confirmed that apprenticeships and the Levy had been a key issue in both LSIP and Skills Commission work.

DJ asked if there could be a way of sharing Apprenticeship Levy monies into the voluntary sector. It was also good to see a link to Disability Confident as a model for supporting employers to create opportunities for priority groups.

LG agreed with the Apprenticeship Levy idea and there is current NHS practice as an example; also a joint NHS / college project supporting STEM students into the health sector.

The group discussion outlined a range of employer engagement work already happening and it was considered important to take stock and not duplicate or compete. TS would bring together a project specific working group to capture that and finalise this proposal.

6 Planning for Workshop (10th July 2023)

A workshop had been arranged to look at scoping future projects, bringing proposals forward, emerging local priorities, links with other associated activity, output gaps etc.

TS would create an information pack and an Expression of Interest form for discussion at the workshop and also to go on the Council's UKSPF website page.

NN felt that we needed to make sense of the most pressing needs, links to LSIP and the Skills Commission, and to home in on key priorities and ideas.

TS would plan the workshop along the lines of

- key priorities, challenges and opportunities in the original Investment Plan (2022)
- what is the position now, emerging priorities, new opportunities, gaps in provision etc
- how to get involved

7 Any other Business

SF asked about how UKSPF financial allocations compare with previous European funding. TS explained that Government was phasing in the money: 12% in year 1, 24% in year 2, 64% in year 3. If that year 3 level was continued for another 3 years, the total amount would be roughly comparable to the previous Cheshire and Warrington European programme.

TS asked if the information presented and nature of discussion in the meeting had felt appropriate. Members were pleased with the detail and transparency of information provided and their opportunity for involvement and input to the programme.

EB is recruiting to a Senior Programme Manager post which will bring more staff capacity across both the Town Deal and UKSPF programmes.

8 Schedule of Future Meetings

The workshop was scheduled for 10th July 2023.

TS would look for a date in late August for the next Local Partnership meeting.