

Warrington UKSPF Local Partnership

7th Dec 2023

In Attendance:

Eleanor Blackburn (EB)	(Chair) Warrington Borough Council (Officer)
Stephen Fitzsimons (SF)	Warrington Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Nichola Newton (NN)	Warrington and Vale Royal College
Rebecca Anderson-Moss (RAM)	Warrington and Vale Royal College
Alison Cullen (AC)	Warrington Voluntary Action
Lucy Gardner (LG)	Warrington and Halton Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
Paul Chapman (PC)	Cheshire and Warrington Business Growth Hub
Andrea Morley (AM)	Warrington Business Improvement District (BID)
Georgia Millership (GM)	Department of Business and Trade
Joanne Higginbottom (JH)	Department for Work and Pensions
Derek Jones (DJ)	Warrington Disability Partnership
Kerry Hall (KH)	Warrington Borough Council
Tim Smith (TS)	Warrington Borough Council
Gail Thomas (GT)	Warrington Borough Council
Dave Thompson (DT)	Warrington Disability Partnership

Apologies

Cllr Cathy Mitchell (CM)	Warrington Borough Council (Member)
Leah Biddle (LB)	Culture Warrington
Pat Jackson (PJ)	Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)

1 Welcome and Introductions

EB welcomed everybody to the meeting and members introduced themselves.

2 Minutes of Previous Meeting

DT had sent apologies for the previous meeting. TS will amend the records.

Otherwise, the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 5th October 2023, were accepted as a true record.

TS reported that the contract awards for the Business Support and Decarbonisation procurement exercises had now been posted on The Chest. Other projects had moved on since the October meeting, as described in TS' written update provided in lieu of a November meeting, or included on this meeting's agenda.

3 UKSPF Financial Position (Nov 2023)

TS presented a spreadsheet showing an updated financial profile, including allocations against each “activity theme” together with figures for approved projects, live procurement exercises, proposals received, Expressions of Interest received, and proposals expected.

There was also a recent letter from Government which confirms that we will be allowed to carry forward any year 2 (2023/24) underspend into year 3 (2024/25) and also still receive our full year 3 allocation.

4 UKSPF Outputs and Outcomes Position (Nov 2023)

TS presented a spreadsheet that brings together all the outputs/outcomes programme targets and the expected achievement from approved projects, grouped by Communities and Place, Supporting Local Business and People and Skills. This is more easily visible and shows the overall position, which includes some projects which might overdeliver (i.e. proportionality of spend v-a-v outputs/outcomes) and some which might underdeliver.

The overall position looks reasonable, with c. 60% of budget already allocated, with more projects to be added in. Approved projects to date are also expected to deliver most of the outputs/outcomes programme targets. However, the actual position (as at end September 2023) shows a very slow start, both in terms of spend and achievement.

TS suggested that once the monitoring returns for Oct-Nov-Dec are in, we will see the up to date position at the Jan 2024 meeting. Any year 2 expected underspend identified at that point could be put back into the pot for (i) continuing the usual process of new projects coming forward, and (ii) open procurement specs to mop up any areas which look to be under target.

The group supported this approach.

GM reported that there is no definite message yet for what happens after year 3 (2024/25), but there is similar feedback from many local authorities about slow starts and concern about limited periods for delivery and achievement.

5 Project Proposals (Supported by WBC Steering Group)

Cultural Programme 2024/25

This proposal is to continue the range of activity delivered in 2023/24, but on an increased scale. It will animate the town centre, engage communities and develop a sense of identity, ownership and pride across the borough. It will work with an increasing number of partners to attract more diverse audiences, developing an understanding of shared history and emerging cultures across Warrington. The work presented will connect to our communities through thematic programmes, such as Pride and Mela, developing our existing festivals to become even better attended and

reaching a wider range of people. The proposal includes several requests from external deliverers, but all amalgamated to be run as one project.

The group supported the proposal, but stressed the need to make links and connections, for example

DT – a cross-Warrington approach, not just town centre, for example Disability Awareness Day

DT – other providers such as Blooming Arts, Creative Adventures

RAM – opportunities for college students

LG – local groups getting involved in community arts programmes

AM – don't displace activity from Pyramid, e.g. Shakespeare North

The Pledge

The Cheshire and Warrington Pledge Partnership puts employers at the heart of informing and inspiring young people about local career and progression opportunities and supporting them to know what skills and qualities employers are looking for.

The Pledge has been running since 2019, but its European funding has now expired. This proposal has been scoped with input from WBC operational managers in Families and Wellbeing (Participation and Targeted Support) and Growth (Inclusive Growth and Partnerships). The particular activities, deemed most beneficial for Warrington, that we want The Pledge to continue to deliver are:

- To run regular Pledge network meetings, bringing together schools, colleges and employers
- To facilitate recruitment events (including Autumn and Spring term careers and apprenticeship fairs)
- To broker workplace / employer experiences and projects
- To recruit employers to support schools / colleges employability activity, e.g. interview preparation and CV writing
- To run an employment readiness programme, including mock assessment centres (for year 11 and 13)

The Pledge aligns with and supports the WBC careers strategy, is helpful for schools and employers, is a valuable use of funding, and there would be a big gap without it. WBC sits on the management group and can direct activity, including prioritising deprived areas and vulnerable young people, including those who are not currently in school.

TS confirmed that the other 2 Cheshire local authorities are also continuing to support The Pledge after its European funding has expired.

PC described the project as building a talent pipeline for businesses and its practical delivery is on a local basis that can be tailored for individual schools.

The group supported the proposal.

6 Revised Expressions of Interest (Previously Considered; now with Additional Information)

Street Based Youth Work

Warrington Youth Zone had submitted a revised version of their EOI, addressing comments raised by both the steering group and the Local Partnership. The revised proposal addresses previous queries about additionality, for example by intending to run activities every evening.

The WBC steering group had welcomed the diversionary activity, but wanted to ensure that it does not displace anti-social behaviour in the town centre to other locations, although it might be the case that it helps alleviate it elsewhere by attracting more young people to attend the activities in the town centre. Health issues should be built into the proposed delivery, e.g. prevention of vaping.

LG supported the proposal and noted that it could link with the Living Well Hub, which also has aims around addressing anti-social behaviour. AM was aware of previous good results delivered through this work and was keen to continue it. DT was encouraged by potential benefits to young people's health.

The group supported the proposal.

Workforce Development

Warrington and Vale Royal College had submitted a revised version of their EOI, addressing comments raised by both the steering group and the Local Partnership. The proposal had previously been supported in principle but considered to be expensive. However, the College had since reduced the costs: the breakdown now had the same £140k for employers' training costs, but the "other" costs, e.g. admin, marketing, employer engagement and capacity building, had reduced from £238k to £158.5k.

TS said that the revised proposal was now in the process for reconsideration and hopefully to be approved by WBC Senior Leadership Team.

NN and RAM declared an interest in this project proposal.

NN confirmed that the College has established teams ready to hit the ground running and has a track record of achievement in this area. RAM explained the rationale around why additional funding is needed, particular for employers to be able to fill places on courses.

EB reported that the issue of take-up of training, and employers' budgets to enable that, had been cited as an issue in the Warrington Skills Commission work recently.

The group supported the proposal.

7 Draft Procurement Specification

Made Smarter

TS presented a draft procurement specification for activity to support Warrington-based small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with the adoption of smart digital technology solutions to drive growth. This will encompass a range of advanced and interconnected technologies, including Artificial Intelligence, Data, Robotics, Automation, Additive Manufacturing, Internet of Things, Sensors.

SF was pleased with this proposal. Some companies have benefited previously, but European-funded support had now disappeared.

PC was also supportive – there had been lots of case studies of successes, but Cheshire and Warrington had felt the loss of previous ERDF projects. It would be good to open the eligibility wider than just manufacturing (as was the original UKSPF intervention).

TS confirmed that the eligibility can include the voluntary sector – the Government definition says *“Enterprise means a sole trader, micro business, small and medium-sized enterprise, or large business. It also includes social enterprises where these engage in economic activity.”*

TS will progress this to procurement stage.

8 Next Steps

Development of ideas through to project proposals for:

- Employer Engagement / Wage Subsidy proposal
- People and Skills activity needed in 2024/25
- Improvements to Community Buildings (to achieve vol sector support outcomes) (awaiting WBC property and estates review)
- Digital Inclusion and Digital Infrastructure Improvements to Community Facilities (awaiting WBC property and estates review)
- Voluntary sector grants programme
- Support for Pyramid and Parr Hall re tourism, cultural events etc
- Feasibility study – procurement – maximise business to business local supply chain and also address carbon footprint / net zero impact

9 Any Other Business

None

10 Schedule of Future Meetings

Agreed as the first Thursday of every month, starting from February 2024.