

Warrington UKSPF Local Partnership

1st Feb 2024

In Attendance:

Eleanor Blackburn (EB)	(Chair) Warrington Borough Council (Officer)
Stephen Fitzsimons (SF)	Warrington Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Rebecca Anderson-Moss (RAM)	Warrington and Vale Royal College
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)
Derek Jones (DJ)	Warrington Disability Partnership
Susan Savage (SS)	Department for Work and Pensions
Kerry Hall (KH)	Warrington Borough Council
Tim Smith (TS)	Warrington Borough Council
Gail Thomas (GT)	Warrington Borough Council
Leah Biddle (LB)	Culture Warrington

Apologies

Pat Jackson (PJ)	Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)
Martin Wood (MW)	Department of Business and Trade
Georgia Millership (GM)	Department of Business and Trade
Colin Billingsley (CB)	Department for Work and Pensions
Joanne Higginbottom (JH)	Department for Work and Pensions
Nichola Newton (NN)	Warrington and Vale Royal College
Alison Cullen (AC)	Warrington Voluntary Action
Dave Thompson (DT)	Warrington Disability Partnership

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 7th December 2023, were accepted as a true record.

TS updated that contracts had been awarded to Warrington Chamber of Commerce for the Business Support project and Groundwork for the Decarbonisation project.

3 UKSPF Financial Position (Jan 2024)

TS presented an updated spreadsheet showing budget allocations and projects approved so far. Revised and new proposals were to be discussed later in the meeting.

However, TS also had a spreadsheet showing actual spend up to Dec 2023. Although approved projects, plus those to be considered at this meeting, made up 84% of our total allocation for 2023/24, the actual spend so far was only 21% (£486k out of £2.3m). The figures for 2024/25 looked encouraging: currently 83% (£3.4m out of £4.1m) approved or to be considered, with the gap likely to be made up from new proposals and/or open procurements.

However, that still leaves the 2023/24 underspend to be addressed. Government has confirmed that all 2023/24 underspend can be rolled forward into 2024/25 and that full 2024/25 can still be claimed.

EB confirmed that a number of projects, some with large budget allocations had made slow starts, mainly due to delays with recruitment and/or procurement processes. Officers were now doing a monitoring exercise with project leads to get realistic expectations on the expected position at the lifetime end (March 2025) and to identify any underspend that could be put back into the programme.

4 UKSPF Outputs and Outcomes Position (Jan 2024)

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. The position is similar to the financial position, in terms of looking encouraging in terms of approvals, but that not yet being realised in actual achievement.

5 Project Proposals Previously Seen and Endorsed by this Partnership, now Supported by WBC Steering Group

TS updated the group that the project proposals for Workforce Development and Made Smarter (business support) had now been supported by the WBC UKSPF steering group, with final confirmation needed at the next Senior Leadership Team meeting.

6 Revised Project Proposals (Supported by WBC Steering Group)

Town Centre, Visitor Economy 2024/25

This project would cover the staff costs for a Town Centre Cultural Events Development Officer plus a budget for external costs to support event delivery, e.g. medical provision, security, stewarding. The new post would be working on all activities across the town centre, e.g. Pride, summer programme etc.

EB confirmed that this does not duplicate the cultural programme – that one pays for buying in performers, exhibits, events etc. This project would be more around development of programmes, and a budget for the other associated costs of running events is also crucial.

AM suggested the Town Centre Events and Marketing Steering Group as a way of encouraging other partners to get involved in plans, and maybe to pool budgets towards event costs.

The group supported the proposal.

Employment Growth

TS presented the project proposal, with 5 key elements:

- a wage subsidy programme to help create employment opportunities for people from priority groups
- an Employer Engagement Coordinator to liaise with businesses about their skills and recruitment needs, to strengthen partnership working and to advocate for priority groups
- support to encourage the sharing of unspent Apprenticeship Levy monies in the local area / supply chain
- a budget allocation to be aligned with an action plan arising out of the recommendations of the Warrington Skills Commission
- support for the Cheshire and Warrington Fair Employment Charter (caveat – subject to confirmation of involvement; needs approval by local authority Cabinet)

SF supported the general principle and particularly that employer engagement needs coordination, not so much speculative knocking on employers' doors.

LG was also supportive and suggested that we include workforce planning for the future and understanding employers' long-term intentions as an area of focus.

RAM and LG were pleased about the apprenticeship levy proposal and viewed it as high priority.

PC had figures indicating potentially 94 businesses in Warrington with 250+ employees that would likely be Apprenticeship Levy payers.

EB pointed out the time needed to get all this up and running, e.g. recruitment processes, and suggested the need for flexibility and to be open to secondment arrangements between organisations.

The group supported the proposal.

7 New Project Proposals (Supported by WBC Steering Group)

Feasibility Studies – Pyramid / Parr Hall improvements

KH described the proposed work to look at anything additional needed, not only for the ongoing work at the Pyramid, but also for the Parr Hall and maybe any portable items that could be used elsewhere. This would align with our programme output of “tourism, culture or heritage assets

created or improved”, although there could be difficulties in outcomes of getting more visitor numbers by March 2025, due to the timing of the building works.

SF advised that for any major capital works recommended from the feasibility studies, we’d need to make sure they are distinct from the Town Deal project and that the outputs do not duplicate.

The group supported the proposal.

Torus / New Leaf 2024/25

TS reported that this project is performing well in 2023/24, after we had used UKSPF funding to extend its established European funded working model. The main delivery partners are Torus and Warrington Disability Partnership. They can demonstrate ongoing demand very clearly, and there will not be any duplication with forthcoming Government programmes, as (i) those won’t be embedded by March 2025, and (ii) Torus / New Leaf have a more proactive approach to reaching potential participants and do not rely so much on referrals from Jobcentre Plus and other agencies. The proposal is for a £20k (7%) increase to the £288k funding in place for 2023/24.

LG was supportive of the project but we need to ensure that all our People and Skills projects are joining up effectively.

EB suggested WESAG (Warrington Employment and Skills Action Group) as a vehicle for coordinated working at operational level.

RAM was keen to build in a focus on learners, destinations, progression etc, and would look at the College’s representation on WESAG.

The group supported the proposal.

8 Next Steps

Further proposals expected:

- project proposal for improvements to community buildings
- project proposal for digital inclusion (including infrastructure)
- feasibility study for actions to improve local procurement, carbon footprint etc
- procurement specs for remaining money and outputs gaps

9 Any Other Business

DJ will retire at the end of March and will look at future partnership representation from Warrington Disability Partnership. The group thanked DJ for all his good work over the years and wished him well.

LG reported that the Living Well Hub is bidding for extra funding around prevention work via the ICB (Integrated Care Board) and asked if she could name this partnership in the bid. The group agreed.

10 Schedule of Future Meetings

Next meeting is 9.30am Thursday 7th March 2024, then recurring on the first Thursday of every month, unless agreed not required.