

Information Digest



To: Service Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Panel
Date: 28 May 2021

Community Renewal Funding and Levelling Up

Councillor Sybil Ralphs
Leader

Sarah Porru
Head of Regeneration

1. Reason for the Report

- 1.1 To update Members on proposals submitted for Community Renewal Funding (CRF) for consideration by Staffordshire County Council.
- 1.2 To update Members on application process and criteria for Levelling up fund

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 Members note submitted applications and timescale for delivery if selected.
- 2.2 Members note application process and criteria for Levelling up application and support decision to defer application to second round to allow for more debate and engagement on priority project and sufficient time to develop a strong business case.

3. Executive Summary

3.1 Community Renewal Fund

The Community Renewal Fund (CRF) is a new revenue fund which will run for financial year 21/22 only and aims to support activities which will help inform the development of the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) which is the new funding which will replace European Funds to support skills, employment support, regeneration and place-making across the UK following Brexit.

- 3.2 The fund can support short term delivery of new activities (sept 21-March 22) which support employment, skills, place and enterprises. This can including piloting new ways of working and feasibility studies. Cross boundary working and applications over £0.5m were encouraged (although smaller bids could be submitted).
- 3.3 Applications were welcomed from a range of organisations including District Councils, community/voluntary sector organisations, colleges/Universities and private sector training organisations. Applicants were required to submit proposals to their 'lead authority' (County Council) by 14th May who are then required to shortlist projects and put forward a selection to Government by 18th June with an expected grant agreement being issued by late July/early August.
- 3.4 Applications taking place in 'priority districts' were required to achieve 50% score against published scoring matrix and applications whose delivery is in non-priority locations are required to achieve a score of 80%. Staffordshire Moorlands is not a priority district for the Community renewal fund.
- 3.5 The Council, working with partners submitted the following applications:

Blythe Vale Masterplan and Delivery Programme . Led by Staffordshire

Moorlands District Council in partnership with Staffordshire County Council. This will fund appointment of consultants to assemble baseline information, market assessment and infrastructure requirements as well as develop masterplan and delivery plan (milestones, cost schedules and sources of funding). Requested amount: £400,000.

Cheadle to Cresswell Greenway active travel route. Led by Staffordshire Moorlands District Council. This will fund a RICs Red book valuation and Structural survey to inform potential purchase of route to create a greenway.

Requested amount: £25,000.

Peak Rural Innovation Pilot Led by Derbyshire County Council and developed in partnership with High Peak Borough Council and Derbyshire Dales District Council and Staffordshire Moorlands District Council. This cross boarder application is for a package of activity including grants (£2000-£10,000) for small equipment and carbon reduction initiatives for small businesses; a farmers green support package (low carbon audit and grants (£2,000-£10,000) for delivery) and two feasibility studies – the first looking at opportunities/challenges to bring forward older properties (especially heritage buildings) as new space for enterprise growth, and the second looking into opportunities to increase access to business skills in rural areas through new ways of working to inform the Shared Prosperity fund. Requested amount £504,460.

3.6 **The Levelling up fund**

The Levelling Up fund is a new capital fund to support town centre and high street regeneration, local transport projects, and cultural and heritage assets. While the Fund is open to every local area, it is intended to support investment in places where it can make the biggest difference and each district has been given a priority rank (1-3). Staffordshire Moorlands has been ranked as highest priority.

- 3.7 The deadline for the first round is 18th June 2021 and any submission in the first round has to commence delivery in this financial year. A capital bid can be for an individual project or a package of up to three related projects. Each application can be up to £20m (up to 50m for transport projects) and all spend must be completed by 31 March 2024.
- 3.8 Local authorities can only have one successful bid for each MP constituency, over the lifecycle of the Fund so Councils are encouraged to consider postponing to second round so that they have more time to consider and develop their proposals. A capacity building fund of £125,000 is being awarded to support highest priority areas if they choose to submit in later rounds.
- 3.9 As the Council has no 'oven-ready' capital scheme that can be delivered in this financial year, which is a gateway scoring criteria and further consideration needs to be given to a shortlist of projects and undertake relevant engagement and business case development, it is proposed to not to submit an application in the first round.

3.10 Details of eligibility and scoring criteria are below, together with initial list of proposals under consideration.

4. How this report links to Corporate Priorities

4.1 The Community Renewal Fund and Levelling up fund, if secured will help the Council deliver against the Corporate plan 2019-2023 aims and identified projects including:

Aim 1 To help create a safer and healthier environment for our communities to live and work - Provision of sports facilities and leisure opportunities focused upon improving health (Cheadle to Cresswell Greenway)

Aim 3: To help create a strong economy by supporting further regeneration of towns and villages –

- Implement the Council's Growth Strategy to bring about the regeneration of towns and rural communities (Blythe Bridge masterplan & Leek Market Hall refurbishment)
- Support the development of Cornhill and improved rail links (Cornhill canal basin and rail projects)
- Supporting the Churnet Valley Railway with their plans to bring trains back to Leek (Cornhill and Rail projects)
- Encourage business start-ups and enterprises (Peak Rural Innovation pilot and Blythe Bridge masterplan)

Aim 4: To protect and improve the environment and respond to the climate emergency- Meeting the challenges of climate change (Peak Rural Innovation pilot, Rail links, Canal basin – sustainable travel)

****Neil Rodgers****

Executive Director of Place

Web Links and Background Papers

****[Community Renewal Prospectus](#)
[Levelling Up fund prospectus](#)****

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5. Detail

5.1 Levelling Up eligibility and MP support requirements

Only Borough/District and County councils can apply. At a district level, the number of bids allowed is equal to the number of MPs whose boundary lies solely in area. Where an MP's constituency crosses multiple local authorities, as in Staffordshire Moorlands, there is an opportunity to engage with both MPs and submit two applications but this could impact on other district areas. Support and engagement from local stakeholders and local MPs will be considered as part of the strategic fit assessment of bids and a formal letter of support from an MP is a scoring criteria.

In addition to district led bids, one upper tier county bid can be submitted for transport related projects – these can cover the whole county, multiple districts or be located within a single geography.

5.2 Themes for activity

A capital bid can be for an individual project or a package of up to the related projects. Each application can be up to £20m (up to 50m for transport projects) and all spend must be completed by 31 March 2024, exceptionally, into 2024-25 for larger transport schemes. 10% match is required and it is expected that this will come from private sector if they will benefit from a specific project.

Currently the Fund as has three strategic themes:

- **smaller transport** – e.g. cycle schemes;
- **town centre and high street regeneration**; Regenerating key leisure and retail sites in order to encourage new businesses and public services; Removing derelict buildings and other eyesores to make way for new developments; Putting forward 'Town Deals' for individual or groups of smaller towns that did not receive investment from the Towns Fund.
- **cultural and heritage assets**; Upgrading and creating new cultural and creative spaces, community hubs etc

The preference is for a holistic approach but package bids must clearly explain how each component are aligned with each other and represent a coherent set of interventions so an application with separate disparate elements which do not follow logic chain are unlikely to be funded.

5.3 Selection Process for Round One

The Council is not intending to submit a funding bid for round 1 because it does not have shovel ready schemes at "Green Book" business case stage which is what is required. Further bidding rounds will be announced shortly and the government have promised priority 1 areas such as Staffordshire Moorlands funding to work up future bids. As is the case for round 1 bids subsequent bids are likely to follow a three stage process of assessment and decision making:

Stage 1: **Gateway** (pass/fail) – can they deliver by March 2024.

Stage 2: **Assessment & shortlisting**- Applications will be judged against 4 criteria:

- Characteristics of the place –(priority rank)
- Deliverability - will be based on supplementary finance, management and commercial cases, with bids able to demonstrate investment or which begin delivery on the ground in 2021-22 financial year
- Strategic fit with local and Fund priorities – including letter from MP & stakeholder support
- Value for money – (benefit cost ratio and wider benefits)

Stage 3: **Decision making**. - Ministers will make funding decisions and will also take into account additional considerations e.g. reasonable thematic split and geographic coverage and in future rounds if district has already received funding (if two or more MPs cover district).

5.4 Preferred projects for consideration

- Leek Market Hall refurbishment,
- Leek Transport project (Leek to Stoke Rail delivery project),
- Cornhill & Leek Station Delivery (including Heritage railway extension; Leek station building; canal basin and sustainable travel)

Alternative project for consideration (Local Transport Project)

- **Blythe Bridge** (A50 road improvements & site access works subject to outcome of CRF application).