

Individual Cabinet Member Decision

Rural England Prosperity Fund 2025-26 Grant Awards Individual Cabinet Member Decision: Councillor Peter Jackson

Report of Chief Executive

PURPOSE OF REPORT				
To delegate to the Chief Executive the authority to finalise and agree Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) awards in line with the council's REPF Investment Plan and within the parameters of the REPF framework.				
Key Decision	☐	Non-Key Decision	☒	Referral from Cabinet Member
Date of notice of forthcoming key decision		n/a		
This report is public.				

RECOMMENDATIONS OF Councillor Peter Jackson

- (1) That the Chief Executive be delegated to finalise and agree Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) awards.

Funds will be awarded within the parameters of the REPF framework to deliver the following projects:

- Halton with Aughton Parish Council - St Wilfrid's Play Park
- Halton Community Association - The Centre @ Halton
- Lune Valley Community Society - Lune Valley Swimming Pool
- Middleton Parish Council - Middleton Village Hall
- Green Elephant Cooperative - Halton Mill
- Silverdale Parish Council - Silverdale Public Toilets

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 As announced at Autumn Budget on 30 October 2024, the Rural England Prosperity Fund will be extended for 2025-26 at a reduced level.
- 1.2 A prospectus update in April 2025 provided details of the key updates to the Rural England Prosperity Fund for 2025-26.
- 1.3 The Lancaster District is to receive £149,994 of REPF funding, to be administered by Lancaster City Council and subject to the approval of a forecast detailing the council's proposals for delivering the funding in line with

the requirements of the prospectus and its update.

2.0 Forecast 2025-2026

- 2.1 A diverse and high impact REPF programme was established for year 2023-2025 following the submission of an Investment Plan that reflected the priorities of the council and district partners. Therefore, the forecast for 2025 - 2026 will have some consistency to the original investment plan.
- 2.2 The council submitted its forecast to the Lancashire Combined County Authority in April. The CCA then forwarded a Lancashire wide forecast to MHCLG for approval. Importantly, the Lancashire Combined County Authority will act as the Accountable Body for the delivery of the fund in Lancashire.
- 2.3 It is anticipated that the forecast will be approved leading to Service Level Agreements with each district authority and so that the funds can be passported to Lancaster City Council to deliver on its forecasted activity.
- 2.4 It is important to note that the funds are expected in July 2025. The council's grant agreements for projects will detail appropriate timeframes and conditions.

3.0 Funding Awards

- 3.1 Grant agreements will be put in place to projects to deliver the REPF, following the successful submission of application forms that demonstrated a clear business case for supporting project delivery.
- 3.2 Each application was assessed on outcomes as well as, longevity of impact, district priorities and value for money.
- 3.3 A thorough democratic decision-making process considered all options before internal indicative decisions were made.

4.0 Proposal Details

- 4.1 It is proposed that applications be considered for a decision based on the following two outcomes:
 - 1) *Award funding and begin implementation:* projects which clearly meet the criteria and can deliver positive impact against the programme's strategic outcomes and outputs
 - 2) *Do not consider awarding funding:* projects which are less well aligned to the criteria or strategic fit
- 4.2 Specific to the relevant portfolio area of Communities, Well-Being and Partnership, the projects recommended in this report are proposed for a funding award in respect of the Healthy, Safe and Inclusive Communities Theme:
 - Halton with Aughton Parish Council - St Wilfrid's Play Park
 - Halton Community Association - The Centre @ Halton
 - Lune Valley Community Society - Lune Valley Swimming Pool
 - Middleton Parish Council - Middleton Village Hall
 - Green Elephant Cooperative - Halton Mill
 - Silverdale Parish Council - Silverdale Public Toilets
- 4.3 Should the recommendation in this report be approved, officers will initiate the

process of finalising all relevant details and agree grant agreements for the projects to be delivered in accordance with the programme's guidance and requirements, and within the funding envelope defined by the council's forecast.

5.0 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)

	Option 1: Award REPF funding in respect of the specified project(s)	Option 2: Do not award REPF funding for the specified project(s)
Advantages	Commence delivery of the REPF project with its associated benefits to the district.	Opportunity to consider other projects by not committing funding at this time.
Disadvantages	No specific disadvantages beyond demands on the organisation of delivering the programme.	Failure to deliver on the REPF programme.
Risks	Projects may require further development in finalising and agreeing details.	Failure of the council to fulfil its duty of delivering the REPF programme.

6.0 Officer Preferred Option (and comments)

- 6.1 The officer preferred option is option 1, to commence delivery of the REPF project.

7.0 Conclusion

- 7.1 A thorough process has been conducted in the development of a renewed REPF forecast for 2025-2026 that continues the pre-work and partner engagement that led to the original REPF Investment Plan and subsequent programme. Projects for 2025-2026 followed the evaluation of project proposals.
- 7.2 This report sets out the proposed approach to award funding to projects that will contribute to the delivery of the REPF programme, and as such it is recommended that officers be delegated to finalise and agree funding awards.

RELATIONSHIP TO POLICY FRAMEWORK

The REPF Themes demonstrate significant overlap with the strategic priorities of the Council Plan 2024-2027. As such, REPF projects and funding awards provide additional opportunity to advance the council's strategic priorities. This is reflected in the strategic design of the programme to meet the Council's goals.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(including Health & Safety, Equality & Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, HR, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)

All REPF projects are required to be delivered in line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, with the relevant contractual obligations placed on those delivering projects as part of the conditions for receiving funding.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Legal Services have been consulted throughout this process and will advise on any necessary legal agreements in relation to grant funding arrangements.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. All awards to projects are

funded by REPF money via central government. All funding awards for financial year 2025-2026 at this stage, are subject to receipt of funds from central government. Regarding the resources used to administer the fund, the award includes a 3% allowance from the core revenue budget from the UKSPF programme. A team has been established to address this whilst working within the financial boundaries set and any additional requirements are being managed from within existing budgets.

OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Human Resources:

N/A externally delivered project

Information Services:

N/A externally delivered project

Property:

N/A externally delivered project

Open Spaces:

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Section 151 Officer would request that both Members and Officers consider that the Council currently has a significant structural budget deficit, and so funding initiatives will need to be (at a minimum) cost neutral to the Council or be subject to the usual arrangements surrounding for on-going support of items not included within the budget framework.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments to add.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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