

Portfolio Holder Decisions/Leader Decisions

Wednesday 29 June 2022

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Isobel Seccombe OBE

1. Multiply Fund

Resolved


That the Leader of the Council:

- Approves the submission of the Multiply investment plan and funding application on behalf of the Warwickshire area to the Department for Education (DfE).
- Authorises the Strategic Director for Communities to enter into a grant agreement with the DfE for funding from the Multiply Fund on terms and conditions acceptable to the Strategic Director of Resources.
- Approves proceeding with a small number of competitive calls for projects to identify and select the specific interventions to be funded by the Multiply Fund in Warwickshire.
- Authorises the Strategic Director for Communities to negotiate, and enter into, grant agreements with the selected project deliverers on terms and conditions acceptable to the Strategic Director for Resources.

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Proposed Decision to be made Under the Council's Urgency Procedure by the Leader of the Council on 29th June 2022

Multiply Fund

Portfolio Holder	Leader of the Council
Date of decision	29 June 2022
	Signed 

1. Decision taken

That the Leader of the Council:

- Approves the submission of the Multiply investment plan and funding application on behalf of the Warwickshire area to the Department for Education (DfE).
- Authorises the Strategic Director for Communities to enter into a grant agreement with the DfE for funding from the Multiply Fund on terms and conditions acceptable to the Strategic Director of Resources.
- Approves proceeding with a small number of competitive calls for projects to identify and select the specific interventions to be funded by the Multiply Fund in Warwickshire.
- Authorises the Strategic Director for Communities to negotiate, and enter into, grant agreements with the selected project deliverers on terms and conditions acceptable to the Strategic Director for Resources.

2. Reasons for decisions

- 2.1 The Department for Education (DfE) has invited the County Council – along with the Greater London Authority (GLA), Mayoral Combined Authorities and other upper tier or unitary authorities outside of these areas – to develop an investment plan for the new Multiply Fund aimed at improving functional numeracy skills among adults.
- 2.2 The decisions are required for the Council to be able to submit the investment plan/ funding application to DfE and to enter into the related grant agreement and Memorandum of Understanding. Approvals are also required for the Council to

proceed with one or more calls for projects to identify the specific interventions to be funded by the Multiply Fund in Warwickshire and to enter into grant agreements with the selected project deliverers.

Reasons for Urgency

- 2.3 The decisions need to be made under the Urgency Procedure in order to meet both the Government's deadline for submitting the investment plan/ funding application and the timescales for expenditure in 2022/ 2023. The deadline is 30th June 2022, and Warwickshire has a provisional maximum allocation for 2022/ 2023 of £768,922 (or 30% of the total funding).
- 2.4 It also – due to the Government timescales, extended bank holiday weekend, school half-term holidays and need to co-ordinate the investment plan for Multiply with the investment plans to be submitted by the district and borough councils for the core UK Shared Prosperity Funding – was not possible to hold a partner engagement event (and, therefore, to finalise the plan) until 22nd June 2022.

3. Background information and Proposal

Background

- 3.1 The Government, as part of the new UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), has established the Multiply Fund. The overall objective of the Multiply Fund is to increase the levels of functional numeracy in the adult population in support of the Levelling Up mission to ensure that, by 2030, the number of people successfully completing high-quality skills training will have significantly increased in every area of the United Kingdom.
- 3.2 A prospectus for the Fund invites the GLA, Mayoral Combined Authorities and upper tier or unitary authorities outside of these areas to develop investment plans for bespoke adult numeracy programmes against a national menu of interventions. These programmes should be delivered across the Spending Review period (2022/ 2023 to 2024/ 2025). Local authorities have the flexibility to determine the provision needed for their area. However, all areas are expected to measurably improve adult functional numeracy levels locally including through increasing the number of adults participating in, and achieving, qualifications up to and including Level 2.
- 3.3 Local allocations in England are worth up to £270 million over the period 2022 to 2025 with allocations calculated on the basis of local authority skills levels, total population size and an area cost uplift. Warwickshire has a provisional maximum allocation of £2,543,359.95. In order to access the funding, the County Council must develop and submit an investment plan on behalf of the Warwickshire area. Target learners are adults 19+ who have not previously attained a GCSE Grade 4/C or higher maths qualifications. They can either be working towards a maths GCSE or functional skills qualification, need specific numeracy skills for their work or progression, or just want to brush up on the skills to help them get on in life and work.

- 3.4 To support local areas to identify the right provision, Government has designed a menu of interventions which they can draw from. This menu is based on evidence of the barriers that hold people back from addressing their numeracy skills and what works in tackling poor numeracy as well as engagement with local areas, providers and other organisations.
- a) Courses designed to increase confidence with numbers for those needing the first steps towards formal numeracy qualifications.
 - b) Courses designed to help people use numeracy to manage their money.
 - c) Innovative numeracy programmes delivered together with employers – including courses designed to cover specific numeracy skills required in the workplace, with employers committing to offer career progression conversations for those achieving a qualification / completing a course.
 - d) Courses aimed at people who cannot apply for certain jobs because of lack of numeracy skills and/or to encourage people to upskill in numeracy order to access a certain job/career.
 - e) New intensive and flexible numeracy courses targeted at people without Level 2 maths, leading to a Functional Skills Qualification.
 - f) Courses for parents wanting to increase their numeracy skills in order to help their children and help with their own progression.
 - g) Numeracy courses aimed at prisoners, those recently released from prison or on temporary licence.
 - h) Numeracy courses aimed at those 19 or over that are leaving, or have just left, the care system.
 - i) Numeracy activities, courses or provision developed in partnership with community organisations and other partners aimed at engaging the hardest to reach learners – for example, those not in the labour market or other groups identified locally as in need.
 - j) Additional relevant maths modules embedded into other vocational courses.
- 3.5 Interventions delivered with Multiply funding should not displace, replace or duplicate existing adult numeracy provision such as activity funded through the existing Adult Education Budget (AEB) statutory entitlement. Multiply is instead designed to boost funding for adult numeracy, enabling local areas to deliver more innovative approaches and to reach more people. Interventions delivered with Multiply funding should also complement wider skills and employment interventions including activities funded through the wider UKSPF as part of district and borough council investment plans.

Options and Proposal

- 3.6 Following a review of local skills data and current AEB and other provision in Warwickshire, it has been concluded that all the interventions in the national menu could have a role to play in increasing the levels of functional numeracy among our adult population. It is also recognised that providers of numeracy support are often best placed to develop and deliver innovative approaches including those working with local communities to engage hard-to-reach learners. It is, therefore, proposed that the Council holds a small number of competitive calls for grant funding to identify and select the projects to be funded by the Multiply Fund in Warwickshire. This approach will also build on, and support, the Community Powered

Warwickshire programme.

- 3.7 Other options available to lead authorities for Multiply include procurement, commissioning or delivering activity through in-house teams. However, each of these options has been discounted on different grounds. First of all, service contracts can sometimes be a barrier to innovation, particularly to the community-based approaches needed to engage the hardest-to-reach learners. Secondly, the Council does not have sufficient in-house capacity and capability to deliver an additional £2.5 million of numeracy support activities. Moreover, it is felt that direct commissioning of either specific external providers or in-house delivery teams would not fulfil the requirement placed on lead authorities to ensure appropriate arrangements are in place for the disbursement of Multiply funding. This includes ensuring appropriate due diligence is in place to select which providers and/ or organisations will deliver Multiply funding and complying with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and Subsidy Control rules as appropriate.
- 3.8 In-house Council teams, like all providers and organisations, will still be able to apply for grant funding from the Multiply Fund. However, their proposals will be assessed in the same way as applications from external organisations. Processes will be put in place to ensure a separation of responsibilities between the Council's assurance and grant management roles as accountable body for the Multiply Fund in Warwickshire and its potential roles as applicant and (if successful) deliverer.
- 3.9 The first call for projects will need to be published by late July in order to meet the timescales for expenditure in 2022/ 2023. The call will identify specific priorities for Warwickshire in support of the Council's emerging approach to the Levelling Up agenda including identified skills gaps across the county and among certain groups or communities. Further calls will be held to address any specific gaps in support, implement the results of any pilot projects, extend successful projects, or tackle emerging priorities over the three years of the Fund.

4. Financial implications

- 4.1 The DfE will provide funding for Multiply as Section 31 ringfenced grant under the Local Government Act 2003. In all years, payments will be made in instalments with the first payment expected in September 2022. Updated investment plans, including spending profiles, will need to be submitted and approved at the start of each financial year. In Years 2 (2023/ 2024) and 3 (2024/ 2025) Multiply payments may be subject to adjustments in year based on performance against projected spend profiles and outcomes & outputs as set out in the local investment plan.
- 4.2 At year end, the DfE will recover any net underspend below 100% of the total ring-fenced grant provided in that financial year by reducing the ring-fenced grant for the next financial year by the same amount. At programme end, the DfE will recover any net underspends. These risks will be managed by the Council only paying the selected project deliverers on defrayal of costs.
- 4.3 A Memorandum of Understanding and grant determination letter setting out the Fund requirements will be issued annually. All grant conditions and requirements

will be passed down to the project deliverers via grant agreements including the financial risk. Governance and monitoring requirements will be put in place to provide assurance that all projects meet the grant conditions and requirements – and that the Council is meeting the conditions in the grant determination letter and complying with the National Local Growth Assurance Framework.

- 4.4 Lead authorities are permitted to use up to a maximum of 10% of their Multiply funding allocation for administrative expenditure. This may include preparation of the investment plan, procurement, commissioning, contract management, data collection, monitoring and evaluation. Local authorities may begin to spend at risk from April 2022. All administrative expenditure claimed must be to support with costs directly incurred in the delivery of the Multiply programme. The 10% for administrative expenditure is expected to cover the Council's additional costs. A final assessment will be made in the early Autumn when the Memorandum of Understanding and grant determination letter are issued.

5. Environmental implications

- 5.1 Implementation of the Multiply Fund and delivery of the projects will not have a major impact on the environment. However, it is expected that lead authorities will be required to ensure that all Multiply activities are delivered in accordance with the DfE's environmental policy. It is also expected that environmental management will form part of the monitoring activities. These requirements will form part of the grant agreements with selected project deliverers.

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Strategic Director	Strategic Director for Communities
Portfolio Holder	Leader of the Council

Urgent matter?	Yes
Confidential or exempt?	No
Is the decision contrary to the budget and policy framework?	No

List of background papers

Consent to Urgency Report

Members and officers consulted and informed

Portfolio Holder – Councillor Seccombe

Corporate Board – Monica Fogarty, Nigel Minns, Rob Powell, Mark Ryder

Legal – Jack Cantwell, Jan Cumming, Nichola Vine

Finance – Andrew Felton

Equality – Keira Rounsley

Democratic Services – Isabelle Moorhouse

Councillors Kaur, Warwick (for consent to urgency) and Watson

Other Officers – Chris Baird, Alison Robinson, Sarah Tregaskis