

Proposed Decision to be made Under the Council's Urgency Procedure by the Leader of the Council on 7th December 2021

Title

Portfolio Holder	Leader of the Council
Date of decision	7 December 2021
	Signed

Decision taken

That the Leader of the Council:

- Approves the County Council entering into a Grant Funding Agreement with the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities for funding from the Community Renewal Fund on terms and conditions acceptable to the Strategic Director of Resources.
- Authorises the Strategic Director for Communities to negotiate, and enter into, funding agreements with PET-Xi Training Limited and Wise Ability as the selected Project Deliverers on terms and conditions acceptable to the Strategic Director for Resources.
- Authorises the Strategic Director for Communities to negotiate, and enter into, all relevant agreements with third parties required to deliver the Council's Brighter Futures project on terms and conditions acceptable to the Strategic Director for Resources.

Reasons for decision

The decisions are required for the Council, as Lead Authority for the Community Renewal Fund (CRF) in Warwickshire, to enter into a Grant Funding Agreement with the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and for the Council to enter into funding agreements with the selected Project Deliverers. Approval is also required to enter into all relevant agreements associated with the delivery of the Council's own Warwickshire Brighter Futures project.

Reasons for Urgency

Lead Authorities have ten working days from the date of issue to sign and return the Grant Funding Agreement to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). The Grant Offer was received on 30th November 2021. Successful projects have also been able to incur costs (at risk) from 3rd November 2021.

1.0 Background information and 2.0 Proposal

1. Key Issues

- 1.1 The UK Government is providing £220 million of funding through the Community Renewal Fund (CRF) to support pilot programmes and test new approaches to support local economic growth, prior to the introduction in 2022 of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. The CRF will invest in projects that cover one or more of the priorities of skills, community and place, local business and supporting people into employment.
- 1.2 The Fund is managed in partnership with local authorities who act as Lead Authority for their area. The Lead Authority is a mayoral combined authority, a county council, a unitary authority or the Greater London Authority. Lead Authorities were asked to invite bids from a range of project applicants, appraise those projects whilst avoiding or managing any conflicts of interest (for example where other Council services had applied), carry out financial due diligence, and submit a shortlist to the Government.
- 1.3 The Council submitted a shortlist of seven projects to Government in June 2021. It was announced on 3rd November 2021 that Government had selected three projects based on the published assessment criteria:

Selected Project	Applicant	Project Value	M&A Costs
SWITCH – Supporting inactive and unemployed people into employment through cognitive and mindset training with a strong focus on mental health and wellbeing.	Wise Ability	£1,127,213	£22,544
Business Futures – Assisting young people into employment by providing training and support focused on self-employment skills	PET-Xi Training Limited	£500,000	£10,000
The Warwickshire Brighter Futures Project - Activity targeting hard to reach unemployed disadvantaged groups through break away camps, youth clubs, rural career workshops, employer focused SEND employment and esports for young gaming enthusiasts	WCC Employability & Skills	1,093,000	£21,860
		£2,720,213	£54,404

- 1.4 The three projects will collectively support 3,771 economically inactive or unemployed people across all five districts/ boroughs in Warwickshire.

- 1.5 The Government will provide funds to the Lead Authority for the selected projects and the Lead Authority is required to enter into funding agreements with, and administer the distribution of funds to, the selected Project Deliverers and thereafter to monitor and assure the successful delivery of those projects.
- 1.6 The Council's Warwickshire Brighter Futures project was among the three projects selected. The Council's Employability & Skills team will be working with a range of other Council services and Delivery Partners to carry out the activities relating to the delivery of the project. Processes will be put in place to ensure a separation of responsibilities between the Council's monitoring & assurance functions as Lead Authority and its role as a Project Deliverer.

2. Options and Proposal

- 2.1 The Council is the designated Lead Authority for the CRF in Warwickshire. It is, therefore, recommended that the Council enters into the Grant Funding Agreement with the Secretary of State for the selected projects and that the Council enters into funding agreements with the selected Project Deliverers. It is also recommended that the Council enters into all relevant agreements associated with the delivery of the Council's own project. This will lead to the investment of up to £2,774,617 of funding through the CRF in Warwickshire. It will also allow the Council and partners to pilot programmes and test new approaches, prior to the introduction of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund in 2022.
- 2.2 It is expected that Lead Authorities sign and return the Grant Funding Agreement to DLUHC within ten working days from the date of issue. There is a similar expectation around Lead Authorities entering into funding agreements with Project Deliverers. Costs incurred by successful projects from 3rd November 2021 are eligible for funding. The activity end date has been extended from 31st March to 30th June 2022.

3.0 Financial implications

- 3.1 The Lead Authority is required to administer the distribution of funds to the selected Project Deliverers and to monitor and assure the successful delivery of those projects. This includes ensuring that Project Deliverers comply with grant conditions around eligible expenditure, financial monitoring and audit, specific CRF output and outcome requirements, Procurement Regulations (or defined minimum procedures in the case of non-contracting authorities), Subsidy Control requirements, Data Protection and CRF branding & publicity requirements.
- 3.2 Grant conditions and requirements will be passed down to Project Deliverers via funding agreements. Governance and monitoring arrangements will be put in place – through Andy Felton as Assistant Director for Finance – to provide assurance that all projects meet the grant conditions and requirements. Processes will also be put in place to ensure a separation of responsibilities between the Council's monitoring & assurance functions as Lead Authority and its role as a Project Deliverer.

3.3 There is a budget to cover the Lead Authority's costs. This is expected to cover most costs, and it can fund additional staff where required. However, it is unclear at this early stage whether the CRF grant will cover all of the Council's additional costs. Some costs seem to be ineligible including internal legal fees and potentially the Council's monitoring and reporting costs after 30th June 2022. (Clarification on these points has been requested from DLUHC). The Lead Authority's management and administration costs are also calculated as a percentage of a project's cost so there is a risk that some of the Council's costs will not be recovered if the final costs of one or more projects go down.

4.0 Environmental implications

4. None of the projects are expected to have a major impact on the environment. Lead Authorities are required to ensure that project activities are delivered in accordance with the Secretary of State's environmental policy. These requirements will form part of the funding agreements with Project Deliverers, and it is also expected that they will form part of the monitoring activities.

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Assistant Director	Dave Ayton-Hill
Lead Director	Mark Ryder
Lead Member	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 (If applicable)

None

Members and officers consulted and informed

Portfolio Holder – Councillor Kam Kaur

Corporate Board – Mark Ryder

Legal – Tamara Gordon

Finance – Virginia Rennie

Equality – Keira Rounsley

Democratic Services – Helen Barnsley

Councillor Adrian Warwick (For consent to Urgency)