

DATA LABEL: PUBLIC



COUNCIL EXECUTIVE

UK LEVELLING UP FUND

REPORT BY HEAD OF PLANNING, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

A. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to seek Council Executive's agreement on the projects to be progressed as applications to the UK Government's Levelling Up Fund for 2022/23.

B. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council Executive:

1. Agrees the proposed projects as detailed within the report as the council's bids into the funds;
2. Delegates the Head of Planning, Economic Development & Regeneration to complete and submit applications by the deadline of 6 July 2022; and
3. Agrees that officers should continue to work with officers in Falkirk Council and to develop a future bid for improvements to the A801 including the provision of a new bridge at the Avon Gorge.

C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

I	Council Values	Focusing on our customers' needs; being honest, open and accountable; providing equality of opportunities; making best use of our resources; working in partnership.
II	Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment)	<p>The UK Government's Levelling Up Fund was announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in March 2021. This is the second application round to the fund.</p> <p>The report itself does not raise any strategic environmental assessment, equality or risk issues. However, some elements of the project will require regulatory consents and specific assessments will be considered at that stage.</p>
III	Implications for Scheme of Delegations to Officers	The report proposes a one off delegation to the Head of Planning, Economic Development & Regeneration to finalise and the submit applications to the fund.

IV	Impact on performance and performance Indicators	None.
V	Relevance to Single Outcome Agreement	Supports outcomes 1, 2, 3 & 4 of the Single Outcome Agreement.
VI	Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)	The report details proposed applications to the UK Government's Levelling Up Fund. The applications do not require any match funding from the council and delivery of successful projects will be managed from within existing staff and financial resources.
VII	Consideration at PDSP	Not required following the decision of Council Executive on 19 April 2022 which required a report to be presented to Council Executive detailing proposed projects.
VIII	Other consultations	Finance & Property Services, Operational Services.

D. TERMS OF REPORT

D.1 Background

In March 2021 the UK Government launched a Levelling Up Fund and invited applications into the first round of the four year fund. The council submitted two applications to the first funding round but, unfortunately, both were unsuccessful.

The second round of the fund was opened for application in March 2022 with a deadline for submissions of 6 July 2022. A report setting out the detail of the fund was presented to Council Executive on 19 April 2022 and, at that time, Council Executive delegated the Head of Planning, Economic Development & Regeneration to progress application and to report the proposed applications back to Council Executive for approval prior to submission. The report also set out that there was an opportunity to work with neighbouring council's and other partners in the submission of applications.

D.2 Proposed Applications to the UK Levelling-Up Fund

As set out in previous reports the council can make the following applications:

- One application in the Livingston parliamentary constituency (up to £20m);
- One application in the Linlithgow and East Falkirk parliamentary constituency (up to £20m) which can be a joint application with Falkirk Council; and
- On application for a strategic transportation project (up to £50m) which can be a cross boundary project

Applications can be made in each year of the fund but if an application is successful in one of the categories above no further applications will be possible under that category. Further applications and awards will still be possible under the other categories.

Any successful bid from the 2022/23 funding round must be capable of commencing implementation this financial year with completion expected in 2025. Officers have considered a number of unfunded capital projects and are recommending the following bids.

D.3 Accessibility Improvements to West Lothian Employment Sites

The bid will provide capital resource to enable the upgrade of the key employment sites in West Lothian. A successful bid will contribute to the Invest in West Lothian marketing strategy. The investment would enable significant improvements to the accessibility of our core economic development sites focused on enhancing opportunities for sustainable and safe access options for employees. This will include walking, cycling and public transport projects. The investment will also afford the opportunity to deliver associated environmental improvements. The project will be focused on carbon reductions with associated improvements to the attractiveness of economic development sites in West Lothian. This will support the creation of additional jobs in West Lothian. The project is scalable and responds to comments from businesses about the difficulties of accessing estates in anything other than private cars. The bid to the Levelling-Up fund is for £10m.

D.4 All-ways Sliproads at Junction 3 of the M9, junction realignments around Champany (in Falkirk Council) and Associated Improvement Works on Linlithgow High Street

Provision of an all-ways slips at Junction 3 on the M9 (Linlithgow) is a long standing project and would provide west facing slips at this junction. Transport studies have been undertaken to demonstrate the positive benefits the all-ways slips would have on traffic flows on the High Street. Improvements to key junctions at either end of the High Street would further improve traffic flows with associated environmental benefits including improved air quality in the vicinity of the High Street which is designated as an air quality management area.

In addition to the works in West Lothian, Falkirk Council propose to carry out junction realignment works at Champany, immediately to the north of the proposed motorway junction. The works are required following accidents in the area which have, unfortunately, resulted in multiple fatalities.

It is proposed that a bid covering works in West Lothian and in Falkirk would be submitted as joint West Lothian' and Falkirk Council bid for the joint parliamentary constituency – Linlithgow and East Falkirk Constituency- with Falkirk with a value of around £15m.

This is an extended proposal to that which was submitted to the previous round. Although that application was unsuccessful subsequent feedback from the UK Government has been helpful in identifying how the bid could be strengthened and this feedback will be reflected in the final submission should the council agree to move forward with the project.

The council has approved a policy on developer obligation towards the motorway junction and the other roads improvements in the town but the Scottish Ministers are requiring changes to that policy. Discussions on this matter are ongoing but the stance put's the council's ability to secure the necessary funding via that route at risk. Notwithstanding, developer contributions have been secured toward the delivery of the works but not to the level which would allow the project to progress. Funding through the UK Levelling-Up fund would allow the works to be forward funded.

D.5 Future Bids

The Levelling Up Fund allows for bids of up to £50 million for larger scale transportation projects. The proposal for a bridge at the Avon Gorge and other improvements to the A801 would appear to fit the project criteria.

When proposed bids to the previous funding round were discussed by Council Executive in June 2021 it was agreed that discussions with Falkirk Council around the submission of a joint bid for the A801 Avon Gorge project should be progressed. These discussions are on-going with officers from Falkirk Council being supportive of progressing a bid.

However, any bid would have to be conditional on funding supports from Transport Scotland as the total cost of the project would exceed the £50m limit on any application. While progress is being made with negotiations with Transport Scotland no agreement on a funding contribution has been agreed. On this basis officers have agreed that any funding bid should be held over to the 2023/24 funding round to allow greater certainty that the project can be fully funded.

D.8 Next Stages

Subject to approval by Council Executive officers will complete the application forms and submit them by the 6 July deadline.

In parallel with completing the applications officers will discuss the applications with constituency MPs in order to secure their support.

E. CONCLUSION

Subject to approval by Council Executive the two applications summarised in this report will be finalised and submitted to UK Government in the application template by the deadline of 6 July 2022.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

The Community Renewal Fund Prospectus and related papers.

The Levelling Up Fund prospectus and related papers.

Appendices/Attachments: None.

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