

Appendix B Copy of Progress Update - Chorley UKSPF Return

Progress Summary (1st April – 30th September 2023)

Detailed project planning for capital spend continues to be progressed, however due to the nature of capital projects having many interdependencies and taking time to resolve before works can commence, there has been an impact on delivery and spend in the first half of 2023-24. We do remain confident that these projects will progress and be on track towards the end of the financial year. For example, Plans for the Council's acquisition of the town centre bus station provides an opportunity to enhance the site and surrounding area as part of planned interventions to support town centres and high streets (E1) but is subject to some delay. There is also the potential to integrate plans for a new tourism information point (E8) within proposals for the site. Programme delivery has focused on the procurement of external service providers to provide specialist support, alongside continued project planning. Several new projects have gone live under the Communities and Place investment priority; this includes the delivery of an Equalities Champion training course (E12), launch of a Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (E12) and establishment of a Family Link Worker (E12) to meet the high demand for children and families support services. A number of commissions have also been made to enhance capacity and access to services for vulnerable cohorts (E11) including:

- SVP Chorley Buddies to deliver older people's activities and reduce social isolation,
- Citizens Advice Lancashire West to provide wide-ranging advice services for those in need,
- Women's Health Centre to provide wellbeing support for vulnerable women,
- Release Counselling to deliver mental wellbeing support,
- SVP Chorley Buddies to provide food poverty support,
- Homestart Central Lancashire to deliver children and families support services.

Additionally, UKSPF funds are helping to accelerate aspirations to develop a shared data and intelligence platform (E11) that will consolidate local data sources to provide overarching, place-based insights to better inform local leaders and decision-makers. This aligns with the broader commitments of partners to enhancing service delivery and fostering collaborative solutions for our residents.

Good progress with live projects continues to be made. In particular, the Events Officer (E4) has supported planning and delivery of several leading visitor events, including the Chorley 10k, A Taste of Chorley and Chorley Flower Show. Two of these events have recently been shortlisted for the Small Tourism Event of the Year category in the 2023 Lancashire Tourism Awards.

Alongside continued delivery of the council's business engagement and support services, the leading focus under the business investment priority has been on recruitment with a graduate Business Engagement Officer (E24) and an Employment and Skills Officer (E30) both now in post to support programme delivery. Specialist business support services have also been commissioned with Boost, the county's business growth hub appointed to deliver a programme of support, including start-up advice (E23), through to March 2025. Low carbon support for businesses has also been commissioned and will be delivered by the Chamber of Commerce (E23).

Feasibility work to deliver improved digital infrastructure under the Rural England Prosperity Fund has raised several challenges around potential duplication with localities covered by the UK Gigabit Programme and the ability to attract a commercial provider to deliver a small-scale scheme within the required timescales for programme delivery. To minimise programme risks, a decision was made to refocus the programme on delivery against alternative interventions and, following consultation to test demand, deliver a competitive rural business grant scheme. The scheme was launched at the start of September and following expressions of interest, 14 businesses have now been invited onto full application stage with an estimated grant ask of over £800k. Whilst this is double the value of available funding, there is some risk of drop-outs, although this is being minimised by supporting businesses with independent business planning advice from a specialist rural adviser. This seeks to ensure that robust project plans are developed as part of the application process and we are confident that all available capital funds (£400k) can be awarded. However, the timescales for grant application and appraisal are such that, whilst we anticipate all funds can be committed by the end of March 2024, no grant payments will be made until the next financial year. Grants will be paid retrospectively and we are wholly confident that the full budget can be spent in 2024-2025. Agreement for carry forward of the 2023-24 REPF allocation is requested to support this approach.

Forward Look - Planning and Capacity

Moving forwards, a leading priority will be capital projects, ensuring that scoping is completed and delivery can get underway. Key to this will be understanding the positioning for purchase of the bus station and progressing plans for local service centres (E1). Enhancements to local green spaces are expected to be delivered over the next few months with a footpath being laid to the King George V playing field and wildflower meadow planting across the borough (E3) in the spring.

Under the communities and places investment priority, pipeline projects continue to be scoped and include plans to support the wider place marketing of the borough through the commissioning of specialist services to help refresh current branding (E8). Work is also in progress to develop a community grant scheme (E11) which aims to launch in January 2024 to support capacity building and infrastructure support for local community groups and organisations.

Good progress is being made in establishing the programme of local business interventions and with commissioning processes now complete, the leading focus will be to drive forward delivery, ensuring that the council's business engagement team work closely with external business support partners to provide an integrated and targeted service to meet business needs and to ensure sustainable growth and employment opportunities are maximised.

Summary of Expenditure to Date

| Chorley Council | | | |
|------------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| | Original Allocation | Current Allocation | Cumulative Spend to Date |
| Communities & Place | 2,300,000 | 2,324,385 | 503,137 |
| Local Business | 1,712,901 | 1,580,000 | 260,818 |
| People & Skills | 200,000 | 140,000 | 0 |
| Programme Management and Delivery | | 168,516 | 40,591 |
| Total | 4,212,901 | 4,212,901 | 804,546 |