

## CABINET MEMBER FOR LEVELLING UP: PLACE - COUNCILLOR MARK SMITH

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Portfolio areas of responsibility:

- Economic development based regeneration including growth and prosperity
- Enterprise Zones
- Town Deal, Levelling Up and Community Renewal Funding
- Asset management/ Council owned properties
- Strategic housing
- Strategic transport management
- Building Services
- Business Improvement District

### Introduction

The cabinet member will present the report to Council and report on any key issues.

### Theme 1 – Civil Service Hub Progress and Multiversity

Following the necessary legal agreements being signed and approval for the project to proceed, the Council's development partner Muse Places appointed Vinci Construction to carry out the construction works for the new Civil Service building in the town centre. Subsequent to the demolition of the existing buildings on King Street and the enabling works, Vinci formally started the construction contract in April this year. The construction activities to date have progressed well. The construction of the shear cores is complete, and the erection of the main structural steel elements has started. The contract is on programme and scheduled to complete during the first quarter of 2025. All construction work is currently within budget.

The Multiversity project is continuing to progress with further acquisitions having been agreed by voluntary negotiation with support being provided to tenants and residents. The next stage will be a Compulsory Purchase Order to be considered by the Council in the Autumn. A design team for the next phase of the work has been appointed and will be working on submitting a planning application later this year.

### Theme 2 – Community Renewal Fund Update

The Community Renewal Fund was launched in March 2021 to help level up and create opportunity across the UK in places most in need. The fund was open to public, private and third sector organisations. Projects were to align with one of the following investment priorities:

- Investment in skills
- Investment for local business
- Investment in communities and place
- Supporting people into employment

Blackpool Council was given lead authority status which involved being responsible for developing a shortlist of potential projects up to a maximum of £3 million, and overseeing the portfolio of selected schemes. The council was also responsible to bid for project funding through this process by the 18th of June deadline.

The council received a total of 27 bids, seeking £7,434,520 of Community Renewal Fund support. An extensive evaluation process was undertaken using an independent consultant (Ekosgen) and a working group involving council officers, Town Deal board and Town Deal Investment Panel members. Further to this, a bid was submitted and Blackpool Council was successful in securing funding for four Community Renewal Fund projects, out of a total of twelve shortlisted, to the value of £778,638 (including £15,268 programme management fee).

A summary of the four projects and their performance are outlined below. All four were required to provide project evaluation reports provided to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

1. Ready for Work delivered by Inspira Cumbria Ltd. (£125,628)

Ready for Work provided one-to-one and one-to-many support to 18–24-year-old economically inactive or unemployed persons through job searching and life skills support with the objectives of those supported gaining places in education, training or employment. The project underperformed, and as a result Inspira’s funding was reduced by £9,025.87. The number of unemployed people supported was 44 against a target of 45, and the number of people in education/training following support was 17 against a target of 45. Some outputs were not achieved at all e.g., no people were engaged in life skills support, although the project did achieve additional results of supporting 10 people into paid employment (10).

2. The Youth Hub/ ‘The Platform’ delivered by Blackpool Council (£443,824)

The Platform worked to support young people (16-24) in the town to access jobs and training and to make the jump from school or unemployment into work smoother and easier. This project achieved and exceeded all its contracted results under budget by £13,634.29. The number of people in education/training following the support was 127 against a target of 75. 393 unemployed people were supported against a target of 300.

### 3. Piloting Place-Based Innovation Catalysts delivered by Lancaster University (£180,579)

This project targeted to improve economic growth and prosperity in Blackpool by targeting innovative sectors to provide one-to-one and one-to-many support to local “innovation driven businesses” resulting in the development of innovation plans and knowledge transfer activities. The project achieved all but one target, but this was offset by exceeding three others and so was paid out all funding in full. 15 organisations and businesses were engaged and participated in the project, with 15 innovation plans formed and enacted against a target of 15. Ultimately this methodology provided the foundation for a number of subsequent projects, one of which is detailed in the Cabinet Member for Climate Change and the Environment’s report.

### 4. The role of Digital Museums and archives in culture-led regeneration delivered by the University of Central Lancashire (£13,339).

This project provided tangible insights into how digital museums and archives could affect local pride, can be exploited by local communities, improve social cohesion and strengthen collaboration. The project experienced underperformance issues and a sanction of £435.63 was applied against its original allocation. 14 organisations and businesses engaged and participated in the project against a target of 19, whilst the number of innovation plans developed because of their support was 2 against a target of 5.

Grant payments were dependent upon the receipt of satisfactory interim and final reports. The Council received £755,522.71 overall (£740,254.71 for project specific activity spend and £15,268 in management fees). A total of £23,095.79 was not claimed against the original funding application due to funds not being defrayed by the Youth Hub, and funding retained against the University of Central Lancashire and Inspira led schemes where they did not achieve all outputs. All four projects were signed off as completed in September 2022.

Lessons have been learnt from the Community Renewal Fund programme especially around the process for dealing with any sanctions and ensuring timely claims returns. These lessons have influenced programme management of the current Shared Prosperity Fund, Levelling-Up Fund and Town Deal programmes.

## **General questions / comments**

Councillors will have the opportunity to raise questions / comments on any matter in the Cabinet Member’s portfolio.