

# Eden District Council

## Finance Scrutiny Committee Minutes

**Date: 10 January 2023 Venue: The Council Chamber, Town Hall, Corney Place, Penrith, CA11 7QF Time: 6.45 pm**

### Present:

Chair:	Councillor P Dew	
Vice Chair:	Councillor D Ryland	
Councillors:	G Nicolson OBE	W Patterson
	P G Baker	M Hanley
Officers Present:	Fergus McMorro, Assistant Director Development	
Democratic Services Officer:	Karen Edmondson	

### FSc/26/01/23 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillor Burgin  
Councillor McCall  
Councillor Wicks

### FSc/27/01/23 Minutes

Proposed by Councillor P Baker  
Seconded by Councillor P Dew

and **RESOLVED** that the minutes FSc/19/11/22 to FSc/25/11/22 of the meeting of this committee held on the 16<sup>th</sup> November 2022 be confirmed and signed as a correct record of those proceedings.

### FSc/28/01/23 Declarations of Interest

A Member of a Community Trust noted that they would not participate in any discussion related to projects connected to the said trust.

### FSc/29/01/23 Inspiring Eden Project

Members considered the report no. DCE01/23 of the Assistant Director Development, which the Finance Scrutiny Committee had requested to scrutinise Inspiring Eden, the council's plan for economic recovery, prosperity, and levelling up.

The Assistant Director Development, Fergus McMorro, provided an update to Members and highlighted the following key milestones:

- The investment plan for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) has been completed, submitted and accepted.
- Opportunity has been taken to submit an investment plan for UKSPF Rural Top Up to secure approximately £1m of funding for spending in the next financial year. Awaiting outcome.
- In response to an invitation from government, the Council submitted an expression of interest for the establishment of an investment zone. The Council worked with Cumbria County Council and gained support from Westmorland and Furness Shadow Authority on proposals for an area near J41 of the M6. The investment zone initiative has not been taken forward by government.
- The Assistant Director Development clarified that this does not affect the levelling up bid for the Council's own proposals for an Enterprise Hub which has been submitted on that area. That is still a live bid.
- Project documents are being developed for the Borderlands Place Project for Penrith which have a notional allocation of £3m. The Council is leading on the Town Hall, Castle Park and Penrith Station projects.
- Project development is continuing. Approximately 130 expressions of interest are in the project pipeline.

Members asked the following questions of the Assistant Director Delivery:

1. Can Members have a copy of the slides presented?

**Response:** Yes.

2. Of the £3m for Penrith that is currently under review, is any of that attributed to the Penrith Neighbourhood Plan?

**Response:** No, those projects do not specifically relate to that bid. The Neighbourhood Plan is a planning tool and it is the Penrith Plan that backs up the proposals for the Penrith Place Fund.

3. The slides presented show a committed spend of £20,000 subject to contract for Eden Community Tree Nursery. Could you elaborate on whether that is a Trust or a Charity?

**Response:** I believe it is a Trust. The concept relates to a need to plant trees for a variety of different reasons in the district and the need for training, for example in managing nurseries. It is a green initiative linked to future sustainability.

4. We have been shown a list of projects totalling approx. £768,000 with a total budget of £780,000. The possibility of applying for additional funds is set out within the report, can you explain that please and why that is necessary.

**Response:** That relates to the Council's own budgets. We don't now think that opportunity is there. There is potential for additional funds through the UK Shared

Prosperity Fund which is part of the same programme and could part fund some of the projects. The Rural Top Up Fund is also potential additional funding. The general principle is to use the funding already in place to draw in as much as we can from other funding sources.

5. Most decisions have only been made in principle, is the 31<sup>st</sup> March deadline a real deadline or aspirational?

**Response:** As we move into W&F if we are contracted with partners then those contracts will continue into the new authority. However, projects that have been able to demonstrate early expenditure have been prioritised. For the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the year 1 investment plan requires that monies must be spent in the first year. However, we hope that some flexibility may be allowed as the decisions on the funding came very late in the year.

The importance of making the distinction between those who have to spend the funds before 31 March 2023 and those which are contracted and could be carried forward into Westmorland and Furness was noted.

6. To what extent is the levelling up fund bid for the enterprise hub independent from the idea of an investment zone? Will government look unfavourably on that if the investment zone is now being separated from the enterprise hub?

**Response:** There is no connection between the two and the Levelling Up bid will continue in the assessment process.

7. On page 16 of the report, Connectivity, there is no mention of the Penrith Parking Movement Scheme. Why is it not mentioned specifically in the report? There are some concerns as to whether this is going to come to fruition.

**Response:** It was acknowledged that it remains important for Penrith and its continued existence and contribution should be mentioned. It is something we support and would want to bring forward. There are some resource difficulties and timing issues in doing this. The processes of bidding for UKSPF are complex and there is a small window for submitting deliverable projects. Projects arising from the Parking and Movement Study could be considered in future rounds. Members asked for it to be noted that the very tight time constraints are very limiting in that sometimes the best decisions are not necessarily being made. Whether the project can be delivered on time is a factor. Members wished to note that the Council has done exceptionally well in what has been achieved, further that this was a multi-complex task with additional consideration needing to be given to LGR.

8. The Eden Travel Bursary scheme is an important scheme for sixth formers. Can you provide information on how it is actually working, how many students are benefitting from the bursary scheme and where those students mainly reside?

**Response:** A written response to be provided.

9. It was noted that there is an impressive range of projects with a number of recurring recipients. The focus seems very much on the four main towns. There are employment sites within some of the bigger villages that are capable of development in terms of levelling up. How proactive has the Council been in pursuing applications from areas like that with the aim of creating jobs in some of those outlying villages?

**Response:** A full scale public consultation wasn't undertaken; this was limited to existing stakeholders. Time constraints were a major factor in terms of the need to

identify projects that could deliver quickly and those organisations that have a track record of delivery. There are significant funds available from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund over the next three years and there are a number of projects in the pipeline. Those that aren't successful this time will have the opportunity to work more on their projects and bring forward for future funding. The concern is noted and consideration will be given to wider publicity for future calls for expressions of interests.

10. It was noted that on page 17 of the report Table 1 showed Eden at the bottom of the Table for UKSPF Allocation in Cumbria and third in Table 2 for the UKSPF Rural Top Up. Who decides these allocations?

**Response:** The figures are determined by civil servants and relate to population levels and indicators of need.

11. Has the Council challenged the process for setting these allocations?

**Response:** Not directly, but working through the Rural Services Network representations have been made to government about the relevance of some of the indicators they use for rural areas.

Proposed by Councillor W Patterson  
Seconded by Councillor D Ryland

and **RESOLVED** that the Committee review the Inspiring Eden Update Report provided to Cabinet for their meeting on 15 November 2022 and raise any questions they have for consideration and response.

### **FSc/30/01/23 Any Other Items Which the Chair Decides are urgent**

There were no urgent items of business.

### **FSc/31/01/23 Date of Next Scheduled Meeting**

The date of the next meeting of the committee is to be confirmed.

The meeting closed at 7.33 pm

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