
NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

5 December 2023

Cabinet

Title: Irvine Town Centre: Long-Term Plan for Towns Levelling Up Fund Award

Purpose: To update Cabinet on the award of funding for Irvine under the Levelling Up Fund and seek approval for the interim governance structure and early commencement of work to develop a Long-Term Plan for the investment.

Recommendation: That Cabinet:

- a) Notes and approves the acceptance of the award of £20m for Irvine under the Levelling Up Fund;
- b) Approves the interim governance structure and early commencement of work to develop a Long-Term Plan for the investment; and
- c) Agrees to receive a further report on progress and the updated approach informed by the forthcoming detailed guidance.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 On 30 September the UK Government announced that 55 towns across the UK would benefit from £20 million of investment through endowment style funding over a 10 year period. Irvine was identified as one of seven towns in Scotland to benefit from this funding under the Levelling Up Fund.
- 1.2 The Long-Term Plan for Towns Prospectus was published on 1 October with further detailed guidance on the operation of the funding anticipated alongside a full toolkit. This report seeks approval for the acceptance of the award and agreement for the initial approach to the development of a Long-Term Plan for the investment. A further report on progress and the updated approach informed by the forthcoming detailed guidance will be brought to a future Cabinet.

2. Background

- 2.1 The UK Government's Long-Term Plan for Towns Prospectus as part of the Levelling Up Fund was published on 1 October 2023. This will invest £1.1 billion into 55 towns across the UK, of which seven are within Scotland, including Irvine. The other six Scottish towns are Kilmarnock, Greenock, Coatbridge, Clydebank, Dumfries and Elgin. Towns were selected using the Levelling Up Needs Index methodology. This considered metrics covering skills, pay, productivity and health alongside the Scottish

Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), the City and Town Classifications of Constituencies and Local Authorities dataset.

- 2.2 The provisions within the prospectus currently relate to delivery in England. The prospectus states that UK Government will work with local partners, including local authorities and Scottish Government, to ensure funding and support aligns with other programmes to have the best possible impact. A full toolkit and guidance will be published for Scotland informed by engagement with the Scottish Government.
- 2.3 The Long-Term Plan for Towns seeks to place local people at the heart of the decision making process and to provide the funding to support delivery. The prospectus provides a high level framework for the investment which includes the:
- Development of a Long-Term Plan to invest in and regenerate the town, based on the priorities of local people and put to local people for consultation.
 - Provision of £20 million in endowment-style funding and support over ten years to support the Plan's delivery. This includes capital and revenue funding to provide support and long-term certainty to deliver projects over multiple years and the flexibility to invest in interventions based on evolving local needs and priorities. This aims to ensure a focus on long-term strategic transformation as well as shorter-term improvements.
 - Establishment of a Town Board including broad representation across the community, local business, social enterprise, local authority and public sector interests to oversee the development and delivery of the Long-Term Plan.
 - Provision of a toolkit of powers in relation to anti-social behaviour, licencing and town centre living.
- 2.4 The Town Board approach detailed in the prospectus specifically relates to the structures required to support delivery in England. This notes the potential to adapt existing governance structures to fulfil the Town Board function. Detailed guidance on the arrangements required in Scotland is anticipated and it is expected that a similar approach will be adopted. A new High Streets and Towns Task Force is also to be established to provide direct Government support.
- 2.5 The intention outlined in the prospectus is that the Town Board (or equivalent) will be responsible for identifying the issues and priorities on which the Long-Term Plan will focus and supporting a process of ongoing community engagement. It will work with the local authority to develop the Plan, setting out how local partners will use their knowledge, powers, assets and new funding to deliver for their communities. It will also assist in identifying opportunities to secure additional funding or private investment to support the Plan and oversee the delivery of identified projects.
- 2.6 The expected timeline for the development of a Long-Term Plan is summarised as follows:
- By April 2024 – Local authorities to bring local partners together to form Town Boards or expand existing arrangements and start the process of setting out a long-term vision based on local priorities.
 - Spring 2024 – Once a Town Board (or equivalent) has been formed, capacity funding will be released to support the development of investment plans, including additional community engagement activities. Ongoing engagement will be available from the Towns Taskforce.

- From Summer 2024 – Submission of Long-Term Plans and release of year one funding, subject to assessment of the Plan by DHLUC.

2.7 The prospectus encourages Local Authorities to start bringing together partners who will form part of the Town Board in advance of April 2024 and to begin to set out a vision, formulate investment priorities and engage with local communities. It notes that where an existing Board or structure exists, this can be expanded and adapted. Capacity funding will be available from Spring 2024 where such structures are in place. To ensure that Long-Term Plans reflect local priorities, improvements can be identified under three broad investment themes:

- Safety and Security for example security infrastructure;
- High Streets, Heritage and Regeneration such as repurposing vacant commercial units or improving greenspaces; and
- Transport and Connectivity such as active travel or public transport infrastructure.

2.8 Officers continue to engage with officials of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DHLUC) on the Fund. At present, detail is limited to that available within the prospectus. The proposals for an interim governance structure and initial approach to the development of a Long-Term Plan are therefore informed by the available information. These aim to build on the Council's positive track record of working in partnership with communities and organisations to identify and deliver on local priorities, investment to date in Irvine Town Centre and previous consultation exercises.

2.9 Recognising existing arrangements within localities, it is proposed that a sub-group of the Irvine Locality Partnership be formed including the representation outlined in the prospectus as an interim governance structure. This would include representatives from the local community, local business, social enterprise, local authority and public sector interests. Informed by the forthcoming toolkit and guidance, this group would help co-produce the long term arrangements in terms of governance and the Town Board (or equivalent) structure, consultation and engagement approaches and the programme for the development of the Long-Term Plan for Irvine. This would include an initial review of the previous consultation and engagement outputs and identify requirements for further survey or analysis at this stage. Cabinet will be aware that at its meeting on 17 May 2023, North Ayrshire Council agreed that a working group of local Elected Members and relevant Officers be established to discuss and evaluate options outlining the ownership position and options for bringing the former Forum building, former Ruby Tuesdays building and subsequent surrounding buildings that have fallen into disrepair back into a usable state. The work and findings of the short life Member/Officer Working Group will taken into consideration as part of the development of the Long-Term Plan for Irvine..

2.10 It is proposed the development of the Long-Term Plan for Irvine will adopt a Community Wealth Building approach to the development of the Irvine Framework for investment to ensure that its delivery contributes across the pillars. This aims to contribute to the delivery of a wellbeing economy and will ensure the Plan provides a framework for investment which:

- Provides a clear articulation, evidenced by local engagement, of the priorities of town residents;

- Outlines how the £20 million endowment-style funding and support will be deployed in line with investment themes to support these priorities;
- Identifies how local authorities, anchors, community groups and businesses will use existing assets and resources to support these priorities;
- Illustrates how the Town Board (or equivalent) intends to attract additional funding and investment to support these priorities; and
- Demonstrates how members of the Town Board (or equivalent) will use existing powers and flexibilities to support these priorities.

2.11 An initial update has been provided to the Irvine Locality Partnership on the award. A further meeting will be held in January 2024 to develop the sub-group. Representation on the sub-group will be informed by the prospectus and any published guidance.

2.12 Officers will liaise with UK and Scottish Governments to inform the development of the Scottish toolkit and guidance and understand funding implications. They will also establish relationships with the other Scottish towns to share best practice. A further report will be brought for Cabinet's consideration when the Scottish guidance and toolkit are available. This will set out the updated approach to delivery, formal governance structure and provide further details on the development of the Long-Term Plan, including staffing resource requirements and financial implications.

3. Proposals

3.1 The Cabinet:

- a) Notes and approves acceptance of the award of £20m for Irvine under the Levelling Up Fund;
- b) Approves the interim governance structure and early commencement of work to develop a Long-Term Plan for the investment; and
- c) Agrees to receive a further report on progress and the updated approach informed by the forthcoming detailed guidance.

4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty

Financial

4.1 The Long-Term Plan notes the intention to use the Financial Assistance power under Section 50 of the UK Internal Market Act to fund towns directly whilst working with the Scottish Government to determine the most appropriate delivery structure. Further detailed guidance on the operation of the Fund is anticipated. Capacity funding is expected to be released in Spring 2024, the value of which is still to be confirmed. It is envisaged that the overall award will include a resource element which will allow for the development of the investment plan, project management costs and any staffing resources required.

Human Resources

4.2 Additional staff resource, for example a Town Centre Manager, will be required to support the delivery of the Fund and the development of a Long-Term Plan for Irvine due to the scale and duration of the award. It is envisaged that the cost of this will be met by resource element of the award. The extent of the staff resource required will be established when further detail is available on the operation of the Fund.

Legal

4.3 The legal implications of the Long-Term Plan for Irvine will be considered through its development and Legal advice taken as necessary. Legal agreements will be developed on a project by project basis as required with support from Legal Services. Negotiation in relation to land and building acquisitions will be undertaken as necessary with support from the Council's Legal Services and Property Management and Investment Service. Mechanisms such as Compulsory Purchase Orders will be considered on a case by case basis, where considered appropriate.

Equality/Socio-economic

4.4 The Fund's methodology for town selection was informed by the Levelling Up Needs Index. The Fund aims to support town centre regeneration and promote economic development. This considers metrics covering skills, pay, productivity and health alongside the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. This approach aims to ensure funding is directly award to the towns which will benefit most. The development and implementation of a Long-Term Plan for Irvine will provide opportunities to:

- Reverse economic, social and physical decline and reduce socio-economic disadvantage within Irvine Town Centre;
- Tackle long term vacant and derelict land and buildings thereby reducing their levels and impact on the community; and
- Build community wealth and tackle local deprivation through the regeneration of the town centre by maximising the potential of land and assets.

An initial screening will be undertaken to establish if an Equality and Children's Rights Impact Assessment is required for individual programme elements on a case by case basis.

Climate Change and Carbon

4.5 The development of a Long-Term Plan for Irvine will enable the delivery of projects aimed at revitalising Irvine town centre. This could include promoting and improving active travel, reducing vacant and derelict land and carbon reduction measures. This aligns with the priorities of the forthcoming Sustainable North Ayrshire Strategy and the commitment to reduce carbon emissions through declaration of a Climate Emergency. This will also contribute to the ambition to achieve net zero by 2030.

Key Priorities

4.6 The development and implementation of a Long-Term Plan for Irvine will support all four of the Council Plan's priorities and strategic aims of:

- Wellbeing: To transition to a wellbeing economy, delivering prosperity, wellbeing and resilience for local people.
- Communities and Local Democracy: We will have active, inclusive and resilient communities.
- Climate Change: To achieve net-zero by 2030.
- A Sustainable Council: A Community Wealth Building Council that is efficient and accessible, maximising investment and focusing resources towards our priorities.

Community Wealth Building

4.7 The Fund has the local community at the heart of its methodology. It aims to ensure investment is targeted at local priorities and will empower local communities to contribute to the regeneration of the town centre. A Community Wealth Building approach will be adopted to the development of the Long-Term Plan to ensure that its delivery contributes across the pillars of:

- Land and Assets: by supporting equitable land development and the development of underutilised assets for community use.
- Procurement: through the inclusion of appropriate community benefit of local supplier clauses within projects; and by considering phasing and programming of projects to create local supply chain opportunities and support delivery by smaller scale and local contractors where appropriate.
- Fair Employment: by supporting the creation of employment opportunities particularly within the construction sector. Where North Ayrshire is procuring services, through our enhanced Community Benefits approach we will seek to ensure the creation of local training and work experience opportunities. Consideration will also be given to delivery through employability programmes where appropriate.
- Financial Power: by investing in the town centre and leveraging additional external investment.

5. Consultation

5.1 The Long-Term Plan for Towns aims to ensure that local people are at the heart of decisions, through direct membership of the Towns Board (or equivalent) and through a requirement to engage widely on the long-term plan for each town. The Long-Term Plan for Irvine will therefore be developed through co-production with the Towns Board (or equivalent) and extensive engagement with stakeholders. This approach has been informed by engagement with Connected Communities. It will build on work to date, Locality Partnership's priorities, the Regeneration Delivery Plan and previous consultation exercises.

An initial update has been provided to the Irvine Locality Partnership on the Fund. A further meeting will be held in January 2024 to develop the sub-group. Representation on the group will be informed by engagement with the Locality Partnership and Connected Communities.

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For further information please contact **Claire Fitzsimmons, Interim Senior Manager – Regeneration**, on **01294 315305**.

Background Papers

Regeneration Delivery Plan, 2021

Regeneration Delivery Action Programme, 2023

Long-Term Plan for Towns Prospectus, 2023