

To: Economy and Regeneration Board

On: 14 June 2022

Report by: Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Resources

Heading: Levelling Up Fund 2022 – Renfrew Community Hub

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report seeks approval to authorise the Chief Executive to submit an application on behalf of the Council to the UK Government's Levelling Up Fund (LUF) to support the delivery of a new Community Hub within Renfrew, focussed on the Renfrew Victory Baths and former Police Chambers. The total project costs are estimated at £19.92m. Details of the proposal are set out within this report.
- 1.2 The Renfrew LUF bid application and strategic business case is not included alongside the papers for this report, due to their scale and because the LUF is a competitive process. However, the public consultation boards are available to view at www.ironsidefarrar.com/renfrewluf/event.html#intro1 and members can request to view a copy of the application in advance of the Board from the report's author.
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2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Board is asked to:-
- (i) Authorise the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Convenor, to make any minor changes required following the Board meeting and submit a bid to the UK Government's Levelling Up Fund under the theme of Regeneration and Town Centre investment, as outlined in this report, for £17.92m of funding;

- (ii) To note that the draft final bid application and business case are available to elected members for their review in advance of the Board meeting as required, and in recognition of the tight timescales for their development, to authorise the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Convenor, to make any minor changes that may be necessary prior to submission to the UK Government;
 - (iii) To note and agree the requirement in submitting the bid for the Council to commit to the provision of a local authority contribution as detailed in paras 5.7 and 5.8 of this report;
 - (iv) To note the written support of Gavin Newlands MP, the constituency MP for the area covered by the bid, in line with the bidding guidance; and the support of a wide range of partners and the local Renfrew community as detailed in paragraph 4.6;
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3. Background

- 3.1. The Levelling Up Fund (LUF) was announced by the UK Government in 2020 to support investment in infrastructure and assets that improve everyday life across the country. The funds are targeted at high value, local investment priorities including transport schemes, town centre regeneration and cultural/heritage assets.
- 3.2. In 2021 the Council were successful in securing £38.7m from the first round of the fund, supporting delivery of the AMIDS South project in Paisley. A report to the Leadership Board on 1 December 2021 advised that officers were considering additional proposals which could align with future calls for bids to the fund. The UK Government published a prospectus for the second round of the LUF in March 2022, with a deadline of 6 July 2022 for submissions from local authorities.

4. Renfrew Community Hub Project

- 4.1. Renfrewshire Council and its partners are delivering an ambitious regeneration agenda focussed on positive, place based outcomes for Renfrewshire's town and villages centres. Central to this approach is to advance the evolution of our centres and to ensure that they can thrive as economic recovery from the pandemic continues.
- 4.2. In this context, officers considered a range of options in Renfrew for a bid to the second round of LUF, concluding that the strongest opportunity lay with a focus on the Victory Baths and the former Renfrew Police Chambers, in recognition that both buildings need significant investment to secure their long-term legacy and use. A proposal has subsequently been developed for a new Community Hub within Renfrew town centre.

- 4.3. The proposals would return the former Renfrew Police Chambers back into use and enhance facilities at Victory Baths. Potential options currently being considered include:-
- A swim centre, with enhanced pool facilities, spa, and wellness centre
 - A dance, gymnastics and fitness centre for all ages and groups
 - A relocated library and learning centre with digital facilities
 - New community space across the hub
- 4.4 A successful bid would address long term challenges of vacant and underused civic assets within the town, supporting their restoration, securing their long term legacy and acting as a catalyst for a wider transformation of Renfrew town centre as a modern, 21st century place which is central to the community.
- 4.5 Significant work has been undertaken to support this ambitious proposal. This has involved working closely with key partners such as OneRen, the local community and other stakeholders to inform the proposal and ensure a strong case for intervention within the area. To support the application a strategic business case has been produced which provides the rationale for the proposal as well as setting out formulation of options, economic benefits, costs, and proposed timescales.

Stakeholder Consultation

- 4.6 Outcomes from the public consultation event informing the bid, which have included online engagement and a public exhibition at Victory Baths between 23 May and 6 June 2022, demonstrate strong community support for the proposals. Letters of support for the proposal have been received by a range of partners, including Renfrew Community Council and Renfrew Development Trust.
- 4.7 As part of the development of the project, officers undertook an initial programme of consultation. This consultation took the form of an online survey and a presentation day within the Victory Baths, at which officers were present to answer questions with the community. The event and online consultations generated 605 visits to the online portal, with 509 individual contacts and 235 feedback questionnaires completed and 35 written submissions.
- 4.8 95% of respondents consider the proposals 'positive', with a further 71% considering the project critical for Renfrew. 70% support the integration of the library into the proposals, with 82% support for dance and gymnastics and a further 90% supporting the pool restoration.
- 4.9 In addition, 49 local Dance Schools have also been approached by email questionnaire and a series of phone meetings are still underway. So far, 85% feel there are 'positive benefits and opportunities for a new dance facility'. Respondents currently use a variety of spaces in the area and are mostly happy with the quality and facilities. Regular classes usually receive between 30-100 participants per week, some are larger than that.

- 4.10 One contributor suggested, *“The extreme lack of venues that are willing to take a booking for a dance performance show [is the main challenge]. Facilities that are built new a few years ago were never designed to cater for dance schools or performance shows even though older venues were demolished. Therefore, schools are having to travel further afield and spend thousands of £ elsewhere that isn’t benefiting their local community”*
- 4.11 Consultees from the community/professional dance sector have been very positive regarding the benefits of having bespoke new spaces – *“there is a dearth of rehearsal spaces for companies in the greater Glasgow area”*. All have offered to help with advice or more direct usage if the project develops. Some suggest the wellbeing element should be a key strategic driver, others note the long history of community dance development in Renfrewshire and see this as a natural next step, greatly enhancing the creative and cultural infrastructure of the area. One saw it as an opportunity to brand the area as the most culture-friendly area for young people in Scotland (along with PACE and right2dance).

5. Levelling Up Fund

- 5.1 LUF is a competitive fund established by the UK Government, with funding distributed to places across the UK on the basis of successful project selection. The Fund has set aside at least £800 million across Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland over four years from 2021-2022 to 2024-2025.
- 5.2 LUF aims to invest in local infrastructure that has a visible impact on people and their communities. The Fund is jointly managed by HM Treasury (HMT), the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and the Department for Transport (DfT). The funds are targeted at high value, local investment priorities under the themes of transport, town centre regeneration and cultural/heritage assets.
- 5.3 A local authority can bid under one of the three themes and can be awarded up to £20m per each MP constituency within the area, plus one transport bid which may be up to £50m. The Council were successful in securing £38.7m from the first round of the fund under the transport theme, supporting delivery of the AMIDS South project in Paisley.
Therefore, the Council would, optimally, have the ability to be successful with one award in each of the two parliamentary constituencies that cover Renfrewshire.
- 5.4 The Renfrew Community Hub proposal is a bid under the Regeneration and Town Centres theme of the LUF programme and closely aligns with the funding requirement to upgrade vacant and underused buildings, regenerate sites and bring public services and accessible community spaces into town centres.
- 5.5 Members of Parliament, as democratically elected representatives, may choose to endorse one bid they consider to be a priority within their constituency.

Officers have discussed the proposal with Mr Gavin Newlands MP, who has provided his priority written support to the Renfrew Community Hub bid.

- 5.6 A successful application to LUF will provide £17.92m of funding for this project, representing approximately 90% of the total estimated project costs. The Council require to confirm a commitment to provide the remaining 10% of project costs (£2.0m) as part of the bid.
- 5.7 The capital budget agreed at the Council meeting of 3 March 2022 identified the commitment of £1m of existing town centre resources to Renfrew as part of a wider package of investment across Renfrewshire's town centres. The allocation within Renfrew is to support development of options for key sites and buildings within the town centre such as the former Police Chambers. It is anticipated that this allocation will form part of the Council's element of the project costs for the LUF bid.
- 5.8 If the bid is successful, it would be proposed that the Council would meet this additional £1m contribution via prudential borrowing by the Council. Owing to the very long-life infrastructure assets being delivered, this would result in an annual revenue budget commitment of approximately £0.05 million, representing a relatively minor annual revenue commitment when set against the overall level of potential investment. There would be a requirement for this annual revenue commitment to be appropriately planned for and accommodated within the Council's future financial planning and budget arrangements

6. Next Steps

- 6.1 Subject to Board approval, the LUF bid will be formally submitted to the UK Government by the deadline of 6 July 2022. In the event that the bid is successful, proposals will be developed in further detail and reported to the Economy and Regeneration Board as appropriate.
- 6.2 In addition, officers will continue to consider proposals which could be developed to align with future rounds of the Levelling Up fund.

Implications of the Report

- 1. **Financial** – The financial implications arising from a successful bid are set out in paragraph 5.7 and 5.8 of the report.
- 2. **HR & Organisational Development** – None.
- 3. **Community Planning** –
Our Renfrewshire is Thriving – a successful bid will support restoration of key civic assets within the town, providing a catalyst for a wider transformation of

Renfrew town centre as a modern, 21st century place which is at the heart of the local community.

Our Renfrewshire is Well – a successful bid will support the development of strong community based services that respond to local need.

4. **Legal** – None.
5. **Property/Assets** – None.
6. **Information Technology** – None.
7. **Equality & Human Rights** -
 - (a) The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.
8. **Health & Safety** – None.
9. **Procurement** – None.
10. **Risk** – None.
11. **Privacy Impact** – None.
12. **COSLA Policy Position** – None.
13. **Climate Change** – If successful, the project will be designed to reduce carbon demand through repurposing existing built assets, energy efficient building specification, and reducing carbon usage by supporting active travel, reducing car dependency, and promoting town centre facilities accessible by public transport.

List of Background Papers

- (a) Executive Summary – LUF Bid available on request

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