

WORKING NEIGHBOURHOODS FUND

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Councillor Giel
LEAD OFFICER: Fergus McMorrow
REPORT AUTHOR: Hilary Mitchell and Michael Tichford

Summary and Recommendation: The report contains information about the new Working Neighbourhoods Fund, available to Copeland Borough from April 2007 for three years.

It is recommended that the Executive welcomes the grant of Working Neighbourhoods Funding for the next three years, and seeks a further report in February with more detailed proposals for Copeland to meet the objectives allied to the funding stream.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Government's settlement to local authorities for the years 2008/9, 2009/10 and 2010/11 was announced on 6 December 2007. Besides the Revenue Support Grant, an additional Area Based Grant, the Working Neighbourhoods Fund, was awarded to a number of local authorities including Copeland : £1million for each year of the next three years.

1.2 The forward to the guidance on The Working Neighbourhoods Fund, published by the Departments for Communities and Local Government Work and Pensions gives a concise introduction to the initiative (extract only):

"... concentrations of deprivation remain, and despite rapid improvement in some of the most deprived areas, worklessness in particular remains persistent in some local communities. Many of the most disadvantaged people in the labour market also live in the most disadvantaged places, disproportionately including ethnic minorities – we need to tailor our approaches to local communities.

As part of a concerted drive to get people off welfare and into training and work the Government has decided to establish a new Working Neighbourhoods Fund which will focus on the most deprived areas and which will support local authorities and communities in their efforts to tackle worklessness and the other elements of deprivation.

*This new fund will replace Communities and Local Government's **Neighbourhood Renewal Fund** and incorporates the Department for Work and Pension's **Deprived Areas Fund** – to create a single fund at the*

local level. This fund will include a significant element of reward grant, which will be paid to Local Authorities and communities which are most successful in tackling worklessness and increasing skills and enterprise levels.

The Working Neighbourhoods Fund is not just about money. It is about new ways of working. Through the new Local Government Performance Framework and reforms to local government finance, local authorities have greater flexibilities to achieve the objectives which are most important to them and to local people. At the same time changes to our welfare to work programmes are ensuring they can be more tailored to the needs of individuals and communities.

As we give local areas more flexibility there is a real opportunity for local leaders and different agencies from Jobcentre Plus to the Learning and Skills Council to innovate, respond to the particular challenges in their areas, and move more people into work and training.”

2. ARGUMENT

- 2.1 The 2007 update of the Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation shows that some Copeland wards have very high and persistent levels of long-term unemployment and particularly high levels of people in receipt of Incapacity Benefit. The Working Neighbourhood Fund is to put in place projects and facilities to support people into work and keep them in employment.
- 2.2 Although the most basic information about the reason for awarding the funding is available, we do not yet know in detail what, if any, the Government's requirements will be as to how it is to be spent and the exact outcomes that will be looked for as a result of the expenditure. However, the guidance indicates that it will be for the Council to identify local objectives to tackle worklessness and devise initiatives that really make a difference. Receipt of any future funding, beyond the first three years, will be reliant upon real progress being made.
- 2.3 Copeland Borough Council is a partner in a number of strategic approaches which include tackling the problem of worklessness:
 - Future Generations – West Cumbria Sustainable Communities Strategy
 - Cumbria Agreement, including the South Whitehaven Neighbourhood Management Board Delivery Plan
 - West Lakes Renaissance Business Plan
 - West Cumbria Strategic Forum Masterplan – Energy Coast
 - Copeland Borough Council 5 Year Corporate Plan
 - Lake District National Park Vision and Action Plan

There is an argument for taking up the opportunity offered by this funding to advance some of the existing worklessness strategies for Copeland that we have developed with our partners but also a clear case to develop new initiatives.

- 2.4 Examples of the kind of actions which might be considered for financial support from this fund include :
- Skills programmes for people in all age ranges
 - Development of employment strategies with employers
 - Removing barriers to work for Incapacity Benefit claimants
 - A community chest to support small-scale projects that involve training, removing barriers to employment and providing employment for target groups
 - Employment programmes (Intermediate Labour Market or other 'sheltered' employment initiatives) which may include providing services to improve housing conditions and community safety in the target areas or more general services
 - Rural employment initiatives
 - Additional resources to ensure timely and targeted spend.

3. OPTIONS TO BE CONSIDERED

- 3.1 There are no options to be considered at this stage. The funding will be provided by the Government from April 2008 and the Council needs to start formulating its plans. Further reports to Executive will outline proposed options for spending the funds which the Executive will be asked to choose to support, amend or reject.

4. CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 Copeland Borough will benefit from this unexpected funding stream over the next three years (and longer should progress be made on tackling worklessness) and the Executive will be asked in coming meetings to consider how it might use the resources to the best advantage to tackle the problem of worklessness. The best starting point for this is the planning already undertaken with key partners and set out in existing strategies. However, this funding provides an opportunity to look afresh at employment problems in Copeland and bring forward new ways of tackling them. It also provides the opportunity, crucially, to turn the many strategies in existence into projects and programmes on the ground, to benefit not only the most disadvantaged in the Borough but all those associated with Copeland.

5. FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOURCES OF FINANCE)

5.1 There are no financial or human resources implications arising from this report. Proposals to be brought forward for consideration by the Executive will fully detail the financial and human resources of the options.

6. PROJECT AND RISK MANAGEMENT

6.1 Detailed project and risk management will be part of the next stage of managing the Working Neighbourhoods Fund programme.

7. IMPACT ON CORPORATE PLAN

7.1 The availability of this funding stream will support delivery of specific Corporate Plan actions and objectives:

- 1.3.2 Develop an action plan with partners to achieve “green light” accreditation for the West Cumbria Strategic Partnership (NB Worklessness is a Floor Target Action Plan theme)
- 1.3.6 Develop new programmes in response to the requirements of the approved West Cumbria Master plan
- 2.2 Regenerating Copeland – whole objective
- 2.3 Improving skills and education, retaining skills –whole objective
- 3.1 Sufficient and diverse job opportunities – whole objective
- 3.7.5 Support partnership working to reduce health and other inequalities

List of Appendices

None

List of Background Documents: The Working Neighbourhoods Fund – DCLG & DWP November 2007 – Available in member’s room

List of Consultees: Executive Members, Corporate Team

CHECKLIST FOR DEALING WITH KEY ISSUES

Please confirm against the issue if the key issues below have been addressed. This can be by either a short narrative or quoting the paragraph number in the report in which it has been covered.

Impact on Crime and Disorder	An area based approach to reducing worklessness will also support improved community safety
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Impact on Sustainability	The Council is obliged to deliver its plans and projects sustainably
Impact on Rural Proofing	Worklessness is also a problem for rural communities with poor access to services
Health and Safety Implications	N/A
Project and Risk Management	Will be applied to all consequent programmes and projects
Impact on Equality and Diversity Issues	People in groups likely to be excluded can be particularly affected by low employment rates
Children and Young Persons Implications	Young people are affected by their families' lack of employment and are themselves less able to compete for jobs
Human Rights Act Implications	A number of the rights guaranteed in the Human Rights Act are affected by low employment rates
Section 151 Officer Comments	The fund is aimed at combating worklessness in particular and deprivation generally in Copeland. It is a new element of the RSG which takes account of our "area" needs in relation to deprivation. Copeland and Barrow score high for funding relative to other areas in Cumberland. The £3.5m, which the Council is to receive over the next three years, forms part of its RSG and hence the Council is allowed to use it to support its budget generally. The council has wide scope to use the area grant to deliver against its agenda as combating deprivation and regeneration are a high priority for the Council. The challenge facing Council is to maximize the benefits to be reaped from the fund for the people of Copeland through investing in a diversified regeneration portfolio (including housing, business enterprise schemes, estate infrastructure as well as people development) to combat deprivation and worklessness with the aim of becoming a sustainable thriving community.
Monitoring Officer Comments	No comments

Please say if this report will require the making of a Key Decision YES