

Report Title:	Acceptance of the Local Plan Implementation Fund (New System Plan Fund)		
Report to:	Cabinet	Date:	11 th February 2026
Report of:	Head of Planning	Cabinet Portfolio:	Planning
Cabinet Lead Member:	Cllr Alyson Barnes	Wards Affected:	All
Key Decision:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Forward Plan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> General Exception	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Special Urgency
Integrated Impact Assessment:		Required: No	Attached: No
Contact Officer:	Anne Storah	Telephone:	01706 252418
Email:	annestorah@rossendalebc.gov.uk		

Valley Plan Priorities	Thriving Local Economy: This involves securing new inward investment, creating a sustainable economy, matching local skills with future job opportunities, and supporting town centres as unique destinations.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	High Quality Environment: This includes having a "clean and green" local environment, reducing the borough's carbon footprint, improving waste and recycling rates, and delivering new homes with a good mix of housing tenures.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Healthy & Proud Communities: This priority focuses on improving the health and physical/mental wellbeing of residents, reducing health inequalities, ensuring access to better leisure facilities and health services, and fostering a sense of pride in the community.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Effective & Efficient Council: The aim is to provide good quality and responsive services, embrace new technology, be a financially sustainable council with a commercial outlook, and ensure sound governance.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 MHCLG invited local authorities who are keen to commence plan-making early in the new plan-making system to submit Expressions of Interest to share in £14 million funding.
- 1.2 A bid was submitted on 28 January 2026 and the Council will be notified if it has successfully secured approximately £120,000 funding by 6 March 2026, payment expected by 13 March.
- 1.3 Cabinet approval is needed in order to accept this funding the conditions of which are set out in the report.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **If the bid is successful, authority to the Director of Economic Development and the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Lead members for Planning and Resources to accept the funding under the Local Plan Implementation / New System Plan Fund and to enter into any necessary funding agreements.**

3. BACKGROUND AND REASON FOR THE DECISION

- 3.1 On 15 January 2026 MHCLG announced funding for local authorities committed to bringing a plan forward early in the new plan-making system. Expressions of Interest were required by 28 January and authorities will be notified if they have been successful by 6 March, with payments due by 13 March 2026.

3.2 MHCLG expect funding to be divided equally across eligible local authorities with an anticipated award of around £120,000 each. However, subject to the number of applicants, the funding awarded could be more or less than this amount. The funding will be provided via section 31 Local Government Act powers.

3.3 Local authorities are eligible for this funding if they:

- will be preparing a plan in the new plan-making system,
- commit to publishing their notice of intention to commence local plan preparation by 30 June 2026,
- commit to publishing their Gateway 1 self-assessment by 31 October 2026.
- commit to have proposals in place to spend the funding by 31 March 2026
- agree to collaborate with MHCLG over monitoring and evaluation requirements
- receive the support of the s151 / deputy s151 for the Expression of Interest

3.4 Rossendale has an adopted Local Plan in place, and so it is not legally required to start plan-making under the new system until six months later – before 31 December 2026, with Gateway 1 due before 30 April 2027.

3.5 Planning officers attended a webinar with MHCLG, organised by the Planning Advisory Service, on 22 January. This confirmed that the government's key ambition is to have universal plan coverage in place and to support financially those authorities who start early and will work at pace.

3.6 It is necessary to seek Cabinet approval as it is expected that, if successful, the Council could be awarded circa £120,000 in funding to help with preparing the next Local Plan, which will need to be prepared under the new system. There are conditions relating to eligibility, which are set out in paragraphs 3.3 and most importantly include accelerating the preparation of the Local Plan by six months.

4. RISK

4.1 MHCLG have indicated that s31 funding is not normally clawed back, though spending will be monitored and there is a commitment to meet the dates discussed in para 3.3. The Council's budget for 2026/27 has already identified a commitment towards reviewing the Local Plan.

4.2 The timescales will be tight and will require the Forward Planning team to work at pace, prioritising the Local Plan review, in order to meet especially publication of the Gateway 1 self-assessment.

4.3 As well as internal risks within the Council, it should also be noted that there is still wider uncertainty. Regulations for preparing new local plans have still not been published by MHCLG. Additionally, the Government will be consulting until March on updating the National Planning Policy Framework as well as Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance. Both documents will inform the new Local Plan and may result in abortive work should the policies change in the light of the consultation comments.

5. SECTION 151 OFFICER COMMENTS (FINANCE)

5.1 There are no further financial implications.

6. MONITORING OFFICER COMMENTS (LEGAL)

6.1 Under the Council's constitution Cabinet is required to accept external grant funding for sums between £100,000 and £250,000. All necessary grant funding agreements will be entered into following necessary due diligence.

7. INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

7.1 This decision relates to funding to prepare a new Local Plan and therefore an IIA will not be necessary.

8. POLICY/STRATEGY FRAMEWORK IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Preparing a Local Plan is a statutory function of the Council. The current Local Plan was adopted in December 2021. Under the current (legacy) system, there is a requirement to monitor the Local Plan within five years of its adoption and to start a review if appropriate. Under the new system, the Government is making it clear that the regulations will require that local planning authorities publish their Notice to Commence Plan-Making within 4 years and 8 months of adopting their existing local plan, or by 31 December 2026, whichever is the latest. They must then begin preparation of a new local plan (publish their gateway 1 self-assessment form) within 5 years of adopting their existing local plan, or by 30 April 2027, whichever is the later.

9. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The Government is committed to universal plan coverage as soon as possible. Rossendale's Local Plan will need to be reviewed in December 2026, as it will then be five years since it was adopted. The Government accepts that currently the position with regard to plan-making is complicated and messy but expects it will settle down in time. Until then, it expects local authorities, and presumably Local Plan Inspectors, to be pragmatic in using the new system to prepare and examine Local Plans.

9.2 There is still uncertainty with regard to the make-up of the new unitary authorities that will be established in 2028. Any new authority could be given powers to sign off a new Rossendale Local Plan. Alternatively, should it be agreed to prepare a joint local plan, the work undertaken could help inform this. The Combined Authority will be tasked to prepare a Spatial Development Strategy (SDS), a strategic plan that will sit above the Local Plan.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

New System Plan Funding (January 2026)	https://www.gov.uk/guidance/new-system-plan-funding
Plan-making regulations explainer (November 2025)	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/plan-making-regulations-explainer/plan-making-regulations-explainer#preparationformand-content-of-local-plans
Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance (January 2026)	https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/design-and-placemaking-planning-practice-guidance
National Planning Policy Framework: proposed reforms and other changes to the planning system (December 2025)	https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/national-planning-policy-framework-proposed-reforms-and-other-changes-to-the-planning-system