

East Herts Council Report

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: Tuesday 4 March 2025

Report by: Councillor Alex Daar, Executive Member for Communities

Councillor Vicky Glover-Ward, Executive Member for Planning and Growth

Councillor Tim Hoskin, Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability

Report title: UK Shared Prosperity Fund

Ward(s) affected: (All Wards);

Summary

- This report updates Members on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), which is now approaching its close, having officially begun 1st April 2022 and due to cease 31st March 2025.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OVERVIEW AND COMMITTEE:

- (A) Members review progress to date; and**
- (B) Members review consider priorities for the 2025-26 year and make any recommendations to Executive in this regard (see section 2.17).**

1.0 Proposal(s)

- 1.1 This paper updates Councillors on progress towards delivering East Herts' share of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural Prosperity Fund. This covers progress towards delivering the East Herts Cultural Strategy, the East Herts Climate Change Strategy, town and village centre improvements and business support.

2.0 Background

2.1 The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) is the domestic alternative to EU structural funding which the UK had access to whilst still part of the bloc. Full details were released in 2022 with funding following a "delivery geography" (essentially a district/ borough or unitary area). Each delivery geography in England was given an individual allocation from a total fund of 2.6bn over three years from 2022/23 to 2024/25. Funding followed a national formula whereby every area received some funds albeit with larger amounts directed towards areas of higher deprivation. East Herts is classed as a "priority 3" area out of scale of 1-3, meaning the district is in effect a low priority (1 being the most in need).

2.2 That said, East Herts allocation was £1,773,136 which was higher than most other districts in the county. This has been supplemented by a further £472,841 from the Rural Prosperity Fund (RPF), bringing the total amount to £2,245,976 over three years, with most of the funding weighted towards the 2024/25 year.

2.3 East Herts spending priorities were agreed by [Council in January 2023](#), and followed 4 broad areas identified as important for the district whilst also aligning with UKSPF and RPF objectives:

- Delivery of the Cultural Strategy 2021 – 25, adopted by Council on 2nd March 2021, including Arts in East Herts (AIEH)
- Delivery of the Climate Change Strategy 2022 – 26, adopted by Council on 27 July 2022.
- Town and village centre improvement, especially focused on smaller parishes and villages who may feel they have been overlooked in terms of investment.
- Business support, focusing on in house grant award schemes and 'top ups' to countywide support schemes through Hertfordshire Futures.

2.4 The prescribed UKSPF outputs and outcomes East Herts wanted to prioritise include:

- Increasing volunteering activity
- Increasing participation in events
- Decarbonisation activity and reducing emissions
- Increasing m2 of community space
- Increasing footfall to town/ village centres
- Increasing m2 commercial space
- Creating/ safeguarding jobs

2.5 Although other outputs and outcomes were also targeted, these were the main objectives East Herts prioritised when it submitted its investment plan to central government in late 2022.

2.6 Please note at the time of writing the scheme has not yet concluded. All funding and activity will cease on 31 March. Every organisation that has received funding was required to sign a grant funding agreement or contract agreement outlining which outputs and outcomes they would be responsible for delivering. When the scheme closes they will be required to submit an evaluation setting out achievements in detail. An overall evaluation of the scheme will be undertaken between April – May of this year and the results published, focusing on achievement against the outputs set out in (2.4).

2.7 The scheme has funded many successful projects and interventions across East Herts since it launched. It is also worth noting that funds have been dispersed to a wide range of public, private and voluntary organisations operating in different areas across the district with many residents and businesses directly benefitting. The full evaluation will capture these in more detail and include statistics as well as case studies.

2.8 **Appendix A** contains early highlights and sets out the breadth of activity and fantastic achievements made to date. This will form the basis of the full evaluation to be completed later in the year.

2.9 An important point to note is that East Herts opted to direct funding to different towns and villages across the district to support a large number of smaller scale projects. This is unlike many other areas who chose to direct UKSPF funding to support or supplement their own activities. The following table provides

details on the breakdown of spending across different areas in the district, as at the time of writing, according to the different strands of activities:

	Area of grant/ support and amount					%	Total
	AlEH	Business	Cultural	Climate	Town/ village		
Bishop's Stortford	£4,555	£42,957	£33,157	£5,359	£383,064	41.6%	£469,092
Buntingford	£2,356	£26,497	£3,450	£17,675	£87,847	12.2%	£137,825
Hertford	£5,680	£85,049	£41,500	£6,159	£67,500	18.3%	£205,888
Sawbridgeworth		£62,000		£8,845	£95,000	14.7%	£165,845
Ware	£5,715	£15,000	£7,545	£20,431	£100,000	13.2%	£148,691
Towns Total	£18,306	£231,503	£85,652	£58,469	£733,411		£1,127,341
Albury					£38,194	8.9%	£38,194
Anstey				£3,000		0.7%	£3,000
Aston		£3,000				0.7%	£3,000
Birch Green		£3,000				0.7%	£3,000
Braughing				£980		0.2%	£980
Buckland & Chipping		£3,000			£9,678	2.9%	£12,678
Burnham Green				£2,500		0.6%	£2,500
Cottered	£411				£30,745	7.2%	£31,156
Datchworth					£51,690	12.0%	£51,690
Gilston				£1,011		0.2%	£1,011
Green Tye	£3,396					0.8%	£3,396
Hertford Heath				£2,958	£28,924	7.4%	£31,882
High Wych	£774					0.2%	£774
Hunsdon	£489			£6,264	£20,000	6.2%	£26,753
Little Berkhamsted	£1,492			£2,830	£19,619	5.6%	£23,941
Little Hadham	£1,000	£53,000			£13,200	15.6%	£67,200
Much Hadham	£2,300			£4,972		1.7%	£7,272
Little Munden				£2,500		0.6%	£2,500
Meesden				£3,753		0.9%	£3,753
Pelhams		£50,000				11.6%	£50,000
Stanstead Abbots		£3,000			£9,810	3.0%	£12,810
Tewin		£3,000				0.7%	£3,000
Tonwell					£30,000	7.0%	£30,000
Watton at Stone		£1,900		£604	£14,177	3.9%	£16,681
Westmill				£470		0.1%	470
Widford	£491			£2,450		0.7%	£2,941
Villages Total	£10,353	£119,900	£0	£34,292	£266,037		£430,582
GRAND TOTAL	£1,558,923						

- 2.10 Roughly 75% of the overall fund was directed to various towns and villages across the district, reflecting the Council's wish to disperse funds as widely as possible and ensure as many areas as possible benefitted. Please note the remaining balance of the overall fund was directed towards district wide projects and activities which were not targeted to any particular area. As per (2.6), the scheme is still running a full evaluation will be undertaken when it closes.
- 2.11 The process of allocating funds followed a lengthy engagement process through town and parish councils as well as other stakeholders including businesses and the voluntary sector. More details around this can be found in the [last update to Overview and Scrutiny](#) on 5th March 2024. Following that meeting, officers re-engaged with parish councils to ensure as many local projects as possible were being considered.
- 2.11 **Where next for the UKSPF?**
- 2.12 The new government have provided little detail about their plans for UKSPF longer term (perhaps understandable given their focus on devolution and reorganisation). However in December the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government announced one year's worth of funding for 2025-26. East Hertfordshire's allocation for is now confirmed as £580,075 (made up of £472,975 revenue and £107,100 capital). The same arrangements will be in place as per the current scheme in that East Herts Council is the accountable body for spending.
- 2.13 Government have also added that this is a "transitional" year, presumably on the assumption that the landscape of local government will look very different in 2026-27. They state, *"Whilst 2022-25 allocations are separate from 2025-26, this transitional year should be treated as a continuation of the Fund. With that in mind, you may continue to fund existing projects, deliver the same types of activity supported to date, shift to entirely different ones, or a combination of these options"*.
- 2.14 Although the government have dropped the language of Levelling Up along with the associated missions (from which the original outcomes framework for the current UKSPF was designed), the

specific outcomes and outputs which the scheme is expected to deliver against is largely unchanged, save for some rationalisation, with a focus on community facilities/ buildings/ infrastructure and events, business support, decarbonisation and skills.

- 2.16 The only other spending requirements are that any projects have to be in addition to existing activity. This means we cannot use UKSPF to replace core spending or activity already budgeted for. This includes existing staff costs (however the fund can be used to cover additional hours of existing staff for new activity). Funds can also be used to deliver contracted works provided The Council's financial procedures are followed and can also be given out in grants provided the end recipient is a separate legal entity (ie. Not an individual or sole trader).
- 2.17 Executive are at the early stages of considering how the funding can be used to deliver LEAF priorities set out in the Corporate Plan, [which was adopted by Council](#) on 28th February, 2024, and meet UKSPF outputs.
- 2.18 More details will be shared at the 18th March Executive meeting. Committee Members are invited to submit any thoughts on priorities or activities to be considered.

3.0 Reason(s)

3.1 N/A

4.0 Options

4.1 N/A

5.0 Risks

5.1 All funds have to spent and outcomes delivered by 31 March 2025 with unspent monies being returned to government. The project is being managed to ensure this does not happen.

6.0 Implications/Consultations

6.1 N/A

Community Safety

Yes – some projects which have been funded support community safety (eg. town centre rangers in Bishop’s Stortford)

Data Protection

No

Equalities

Yes – an equalities impact assessment was undertaken when the scheme was agreed in January 2023. No issues were identified however as part of the evaluation we will consider whether any projects have had a disproportionate impact on any individuals or communities with protected characteristics.

Environmental Sustainability

Yes – many projects have been in support of achieving greater sustainability, as detailed in **Appendix A**.

Financial

Yes – all funding is allocated.

Health and Safety

No

Human Resources

No

Human Rights

No

Legal

No

Specific Wards

No

7.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

7.1 **Appendix A** – highlight report.

Contact Members

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