

East Herts Council

Date: 29th October 2025

Report by: Hilary Marsh

Report title: Allocation of resources for economic development projects

Ward(s) affected:

Summary

To seek approval to award £61,383.40 of the £141,828 UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Rural Prosperity Funding (RPF) allocated by Council at its meeting held on 14th May 2025 for business support and infrastructure projects. In the meeting, a proposal was carried to delegate decisions on expenditure of this budget to the Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Growth. As a result of an organisational restructure in June 2025, economic development was aligned under the new Communities directorate and thus the delegated authority to make decisions relating to the allocation of funds passed to the Director for Communities, again acting in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Growth. The recommendations set out in this report align with the aims of the council's economic development function.

Since June 2019, and as published on the council's website, the council's economic development priorities are as follows:

- 1) maximising inward investment
- 2) finding suitable business property
- 3) supporting businesses by providing training and skills support
- 4) creating a visitor economy.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DECISION:

A) That the Director of Communities, acting in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Growth, allocates the following monies from the council's UKSPF and RPF allocation:

- £20,000 to Hertfordshire Futures for business support
- £12,500 for improvement to benches to provide an arts trail along the River Lea between Hertford and Ware

- £7,500 to Meredith Marketing for creating visitor economy content
- £7,478.40 hosting Generation Hertford careers fair at BEAM
- £5,000 contribution for the creation of a Men's Shed in Buntingford
- £4,465 to Hertfordshire Futures for business development coaching
- £4,440 hosting Generation Bishop's Stortford careers fair at Herts & Essex School.

1.0 Proposal(s)

1.1 That the council awards:

- a) £20,000 to strengthen local businesses by providing training and mentoring
- b) £12,500 to an arts trail comprising of benches painted by local artists under the theme of nature. The existing benches are located along the river Lea between Hertford and Ware and are the property of Lea Valley Trust, who has granted permission for the benches to be painted. This project will contribute to the visitor economy as well as the council's active travel agenda
- c) £7,500 to acquire PR expertise from Meredith Marketing to develop and execute a plan to create content that showcases areas of the district and enhances the visitor economy
- d) £7,478.40 for the delivery of Generation Hertford careers fair
- e) £4,465 to Hertfordshire Futures for business development coaching
- f) £4,440 for the delivery of Generation Bishop's Stortford careers fair.

2.0 Background

- ### **2.1**
- During meetings and other communications between economic development officers, the Executive Member for Planning and Growth and representatives from town councils, agreement has been reached on establishing an arts trail, in the form of decorated benches, along the river between Hertford and Ware that would mutually benefit the visitor economy of both towns and aligns to economic development's aims. This project has the added benefit for promoting active travel between the two towns by making the tow path more attractive.

- 2.2 Discussions between the Executive Member for Planning and Growth and representatives from Buntingford Town Council determined that a key local priority to support skills of residents in the town through the establishment of a Men's Shred in the town. This project has further benefits in supporting health and wellbeing.
- 2.3 Meetings and other communications have taken place between training providers and Director for Regeneration to establish how businesses could be supported with training and skills and align with the aims of the economic development team. Meetings and other communications have taken place between the Director for Regeneration and providers to repeat the hugely successful careers events in Hertford and Bishop's Stortford to connect year 10 and 12 pupils from schools across the district with local employers.
- 2.4 Local businesses were approached to submit a proposal covering the promotion of areas of the district that could generate a visitor economy and align to the aims of the economic development team and the UKSPF/RPF objectives. Of the two companies that provided a proposal, one was selected.

3.0 Reason

- 3.1 All proposals align to the council's economic development priorities as published on our website since June 2019, along with the objectives of the UKSPF and RPF funding.

4.0 Options

- 4.1 Do not fund these proposals and recognise the increased possibility of an underspend on UKSPF/RPF project. NOT RECOMMENDED as the underspend will be more challenging to reallocate to outdoor projects during the winter months and will severely limit how it can be spent in line with the funder's requirements and our own objectives. There will be no opportunity to carry over any underspend into 2026/27.
- 4.2 Only fund some proposed projects and scheme alternatives. NOT RECOMMENDED as the projects covered in this report have

arisen from much decision between East Herts, various town councils and other partners, such as Hertfordshire Futures, and thus represent a multi-agency view of the economic development needs that can best be addressed with the resources available.

- 4.3 Fund the proposed projects. RECOMMENDED as there represent the opportunity to address key economic development priorities across the district as identified through wide-ranging consultation.

5.0 Risks

- 5.1 As with all projects there will be a risk that providers do not get all work completed on time. However, getting this work approved at this stage in the financial year should give providers sufficient time to deliver.

6.0 Implications/Consultations

6.1

Community Safety

No

Data Protection

No

Equalities

The in supporting economic development it can be concluded that those experiencing disadvantage in the economic market are likely to be benefited. Residents with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are often disproportionately disadvantaged in the labour market and so it can be assumed that those with one or more of these characteristics will benefit from the proposed interventions.

Environmental Sustainability

The arts bench trail will complement our active travel initiatives as more people are expected to cycle or walk the route of the trail once it has been improved through this project.

Financial

The funds being awarded are restricted to the council's UKSPF and RPF allocation. The funds are received in advance from MHCLG to minimise

impact on the council's finances as monies are not claimed in arrears. Any unspent funds will be returned to the funder. There is no liability on the council's own resources as a result of funding the proposed projects.

Health and Safety

Risk assessments will be carried out on the benches selected for the arts trail and assessments for finding suitable venues to host large events such as Generation Hertford and Generation Bishop's Stortford were undertaken.

Human Resources

No

Human Rights

No

Legal

No

Specific Wards

No

7.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

Contact Member

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