



Report to: Portfolio Holder for Economic Development & Visitors
 Decision Date: 17 November 2022
 Portfolio Holder: Councillor Rhona Holloway
 Director Lead: Matt Lamb, Director for Growth & Regeneration
 Lead Officer: Neil Cuttell, Business Manager - Economic Growth & Visitor Economy, Ext 5853.

Report Summary	
Type of Report	Open report Non Key Decision
Report Title	Delivery of the Rural England Prosperity Fund
Purpose of Report	To introduce the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF), available as a top-up to UK Shared Prosperity Funding (UKSPF), and to gain approval to submit an addendum to our UKSPF Investment Plan by 30 November 2022 to secure the additional funding.
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) To note the REPF Prospectus and confirm commitment to the programme as set out in the report; and 2) To approve the proposal to work with key stakeholders to produce an addendum to our UKSPF Investment plan by 30th November 2022, as outlined in 2.0.
Alternative Options Considered	There is the option not to deliver REPF. Without the submission of an Investment Plan, no REPF funds will be allocated. This option is not recommended to achieve the most successful outcomes for rural communities and businesses.
Reason for Recommendation	Commitment to REPF will enhance the outcomes of UKSPF and enable further support to rural communities and businesses within Newark and Sherwood. Through collaboration with key stakeholders to develop an investment plan, the Council can ensure an evidence based approach with alignment to local rural needs and opportunities.
Decision Taken	As per recommendations.

1.0 Background

- 1.1. A paper was taken to Cabinet on 4th October 2022 regarding the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), which provides £2.6 billion of funding for local investment by March 2025. The Council has an allocation of £3.29m from the UKSPF to spend over the three-year period.
- 1.2. In addition to UKSPF, the government announced the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) in September 2022. REPF is available to eligible Local authorities as a top-up to UKSPF, with an allocation of £891k to Newark and Sherwood. UKSPF is administered by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) whereas the REPF is administered by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA).
- 1.3. REPF succeeds EU funding from LEADER and the Growth Programme, which were part of the Rural Development Programme for England. The scheme aims to support the UK government's Levelling Up commitment through both the communities and place and supporting local business investment priorities.
- 1.4. The priorities identified of the REPF are A) Supporting Local Business and B) Community & Place. The People & Skills priority of the SPF is not identified within REPF. The £891k allocation will be split equally over two years from April 2023 to March 2025 (£445,708 per year), and any underspend must be returned.
- 1.5. REPF provides capital funding to:
 - Support new and existing rural businesses to develop new products and facilities that will be of wider benefit to the local economy. This includes farm businesses looking to diversify income streams.
 - Support new and improved community infrastructure, providing essential community services and assets for local people and businesses to benefit the local economy.

Funding should not replace funding plans for rural areas under UKSPF. It is a top-up to help address the extra needs and challenges facing rural areas. Further details of eligible expenditure is available in the REPF Prospectus (see background papers).

- 1.6. The definition of rural is as follows:
 - Towns, villages and hamlets with populations below 10,000 and the wider countryside.
 - Market or 'hub towns' with populations of up to 30,000 that serve their surrounding rural areas as centres of employment and in providing services. Therefore Newark is also included.
- 1.7. The REPF seeks example outcomes of:
 - Jobs created & Safeguarded
 - Businesses created or increased productivity, or experiencing growth

- Increased user of facilities or amenities
- Improved accessibility
- Increased footfall or visitor numbers
- Increased use of cycle ways or footpaths

1.8. The REPF timeline is set out below:

Scheme launch	3 rd September 2022
Prospectus launch	12 th September 2022
Investment plan submission	3 rd October 2022 to 30 th November 2022
First payment	April 2023
Funding period	April 2023-April 2025

2.0 **Investment Plan**

2.1. The Council is required to submit an addendum to the UKSPF investment plan by 30th November 2022, in order to secure REPF. This should set out high level plans detailing how the Council will use the funding to achieve the scheme objectives and the justification of plans including:

- The proposed interventions and how they address local rural challenges and opportunities.
- The associated achieved outcomes for each intervention.
- The process for project selection, ensuring value for money and determining projects cannot be funded through private finance.

2.2. Collaboration across authorities is encouraged, although not mandatory. It is expected Local authorities will engage with stakeholders to develop a plan that appropriately aligns to local rural challenges and opportunities. Officers have undertaken initial meetings, and offered to meet with key stakeholders including the National Farmers Union, Chamber of Commerce, and Rural Community Action Nottinghamshire.

2.3. The Programme Manager (SPF) will develop the call for projects and programmes for the REPF alongside the SPF process outlined in the Portfolio Holder decision on the 20th October 2022.

3.0 **Governance and Reporting**

3.1. Providing commitment to the scheme, the REPF Investment Plan will be governed by Newark and Sherwood Community Partnership, the Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth & Visitor Economy, and the Section 151 Officer at Newark & Sherwood District Council acting as accountable body for the Fund.

3.2. Formal reporting requests will take place every six months, with the addition of qualitative updates on a more frequent basis. Local authorities must carry out evaluations of each intervention to demonstrate the effectiveness. Officers are also reviewing and developing an Assurance Framework for the Newark and Sherwood Community Partnership that will identify the requirements for monitoring, evaluation and reporting.

4.0 Proposals

4.1. This report proposes the following:

- 1) To note the REPF Prospectus and confirm the Councils commitment to the programme as set out in the report.
- 2) To agree to work with key stakeholders to produce an addendum to our UKSPF investment plan by 30th November 2022, as outlined in 2.0.

5.0 Implications

In writing this report and in putting forward recommendations officers have considered the following implications; Data Protection, Digital and Cyber Security, Equality and Diversity, Financial, Human Resources, Human Rights, Legal, Safeguarding and Sustainability, and where appropriate they have made reference to these implications and added suitable expert comment where appropriate.

5.1 An Equal Opportunities Impact Assessment will be undertaken on the development of the funding allocation process.

5.2 There are no sustainability implications within this report however, the guidance for UKSPF and REPF seeks to support the green and local agendas therefore the project selection and appraisal process will reflect this.

5.3 Financial implications – FIN22-23/8455

Should the commitment to the Programme as outlined above be approved and the REPF Grant allocation of £891k is awarded, then a separate report will be presented to cabinet to seek approval to incorporate the additional expenditure and grant income into the Council's Capital / Revenue budgets as appropriate.

Background Papers and Published Documents

- REPF Prospectus [Rural England Prosperity Fund: prospectus - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1144442/rural-england-prosperity-fund-prospectus-2022-23.pdf)
- UKSPF Prospectus [UK Shared Prosperity Fund: prospectus - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1144442/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-prospectus-2022-23.pdf)
- 4th October 2022 Cabinet Report; Shared Prosperity Fund