

Report to: Cabinet



Date of Meeting 7 September 2022

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

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## Economic Development Capacity: Prosperity & Investment

### Report summary:

Cabinet considered a report on the 25<sup>th</sup> November 2020 regarding the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the resource requirements associated with supporting economic recovery. The proposal was endorsed to recruit two additional Economic Development Officer posts for a fixed term of two years, funded through the business rate retention pilot reserve.

Having successfully recruited to one of those roles (Economic Development Officer – Prosperity & Investment) in April 2021, the officer resource has proved instrumental in our successful delivery of discretionary grant programmes ARG3 & 4; the development and delivery of our Innovation and Resilience Fund; and the development and early submission of our UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) Investment Plan.

There are many more challenges and future funding opportunities ahead of us now, not least in terms of diverse SPF project delivery over the next 3 years, potential projects stemming from the County Deal process and the overall need to maximise our ability to secure external funding.

The purpose of this report is to seek endorsement for making permanent the existing fixed term role of Economic Development Officer - Prosperity and Investment such that these challenges and opportunities continue to have the right staff resource assigned.

### Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes  No

Policy Framework Yes  No

### Recommendations:

That Cabinet;

- Approves making the existing Economic Development Officer – Prosperity & Investment role (currently due to end in April 2023) permanent and for this to be funded through the general fund.

### Reason for recommendation:

To ensure that the Council retains a highly successful and effective Economic Development Officer role which, having developed our Investment Plan to access our £1.8m UK Shared Prosperity Fund allocation, will ensure delivery of the included interventions and subsequent projects over the next three years and contribute directly to the ongoing attainment of external funding.

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action and Emergency Response
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- Democracy, Transparency and Communications
- Economy and Assets
- Finance
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities
- Tourism, Sports, Leisure and Culture

**Equalities impact** Low Impact

**Climate change** Low Impact

**Risk:** Medium Risk; This report highlights the need to approve the UK SPF Investment Plan which must then be submitted to Government by the 1<sup>st</sup> August. Subject to endorsement by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, there will be an ongoing need for robust programme management to ensure that the key interventions contained in the Investment Plan are delivered.

**Links to background information**

Report to Cabinet 25<sup>th</sup> November 2020: [Covid-19 Economic Response and Recovery Resources updated final 181120.pdf \(eastdevon.gov.uk\)](#)

UK Shared Prosperity Fund Investment Plan [Agenda for Cabinet on Wednesday, 13th July, 2022, 6.00 pm - East Devon](#) item 5

**Link to [Council Plan](#)**

Priorities (check which apply)

- Better homes and communities for all
- A greener East Devon
- A resilient economy

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## 1 Background and context

1.1 On the 25<sup>th</sup> November 2020 Cabinet considered a report regarding the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the resource requirements associated with supporting economic recovery. Recruitment of specific additional economic development capacity was recommended.

1.2 Cabinet endorsed the recommendation to recruit two additional Economic Development Officer posts for a fixed term of two years, funded through the business rate retention pilot reserve. Subsequently both posts were recruited to in Spring 2021, though one of these roles (Economic Development Officer - Employment & Skills) is currently vacant.

1.4 Over the last 14 months the Economic Development Officer – Prosperity & Investment in April 2021 has proved instrumental in our successful delivery of discretionary grant

programmes ARG3 & 4; the development and delivery of our £2.1m Innovation and Resilience Fund; and the development and early submission of our £1.8m UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) Investment Plan.

1.5 We have many more challenges and future funding opportunities ahead of us now, not least in terms of diverse SPF project delivery over the next 3 years and potential projects stemming from the County Deal over a much longer time frame. Expertise in securing central funding for future rounds of Levelling Up and UK Shared Prosperity Funding are also especially valuable to EDDC alongside the ability to successfully access external funding more general.

1.6 The purpose of this report is to seek endorsement for making permanent the existing fixed term role of Economic Development Officer - Prosperity and Investment such that these challenges and opportunities have the required staff resource assigned. It is essential we maintain this role with the required knowledge, skills and experience to deliver our prioritised programme of SPF interventions and unlock further funding to in support of economic and employment focussed project delivery.

## **2 Future Focus of the EDO - Prosperity & Investment (2023-2027)**

### **2.1 UKSPF Delivery and Monitoring (2022-2027)**

2.2 The EDO was responsible for project managing EDDC's bid to Government to unlock £1.8m of UKSPF funding. With appraisal and approval for the bid expected in October 2022, the EDO role is required to coordinate overall delivery and monitoring of UKSPF funded projects for the delivery period 2022-2025.

2.3 Up to twelve interventions will be delivered, with 'project leads' from various service areas being responsible for delivery, including the commissioning of work, direct provision of services or developing and running grant schemes, etc. The EDO role will be responsible for managing two of those twelve interventions directly, a net zero innovation fund grant scheme and the commissioning of a business support programme. In addition to this, the EDO role will also be responsible for ensuring the other project leads are making good progress regarding the other ten interventions, requesting regular updates and monitoring KPIs.

2.4 Although UKSPF funding must be spent by the end of 2024/25, the EDO will be responsible for facilitating and responding to the mandatory monitoring and evaluation requests from Government throughout the delivery period and potentially post-delivery (post-2025). This will require the collation of data from the project leads. Any changes or amendments to the UKSPF funded interventions will require sign-off from the SPF Panel of councillors, which will need to be presented to the Panel by the EDO. The EDO will also need to ensure our local stakeholders are kept up to date, in preparation for UKSPF2, presumably commencing in 2025/26 (see County Deal below).

### **2.5 Funding Opportunity and Action Group**

2.6 The council is relying more and more on successful bids to Government funding schemes to deliver core strategic priorities outside of their usual annual budgets. Such

schemes are usually opened with little short notice, limited submission windows and a strong preference for 'shovel ready' bids.

2.7 To help prepare for future bids, a 'Funding Opportunity and Action Group' (FOAG) comprised of officers from each service area will be established by this EDO role to help to identify a list of projects which could be included within any future bid. The EDO was responsible for convening the UKSPF officer group of 'project leads' which helped to identify a number of projects for our UKSPF investment plan. A similar approach will now be taken for other, non-UKSPF related projects, via the FOAG.

2.8 This work will involve the EDO organising and coordinating regular meetings, keeping an up to date register of relevant data and evidence to support future potential bids, and ensuring an up to date log of potential projects is kept and regularly updated. When a new funding opportunity does present itself, a pre-established and formalised group of officers will be ready and able to start developing a bid on the front foot.

2.9 Where a new funding opportunity does have a particular focus on economic development, such as UKSPF for example, the EDO will be expected to lead on the development of that bid. Without the EDO in place, the ability to prepare for future funding opportunities, and action those opportunities when they arise, will be greatly diminished.

## **2.10 IRF Monitoring (2022-2024)**

2.11 The EDO – Prosperity & Investment was instrumental in the development and delivery of our £2.1m Innovation and Resilience Fund (IRF) grant scheme between 2021 and 2022. Overall, 51 applications were successful, with applicants given up to 18 months to deliver their IRF funded projects. The last project should finish by December 2023 at the latest.

2.12 Going forward, this EDO role is required to ensure that the IRF recipients spend their IRF award on the activities outlined in their application and legally binding funding agreement. This requires quarterly updates from the applicants until their project is complete, with a final completion report completed six months after the delivery of the project.

2.13 We required the EDO to continue this vital monitoring work, to ensure that EDDC and Government funds have been spent appropriately. Once this monitoring work has been completed, the EDO will write a report outlining the total realised outcomes, benefits and impact resulting from the projects and any lessons learnt for any future grant funding schemes launched by the council.

## **2.14 Planning Consultation**

2.15 One of the key responsibilities of this EDO role at present is to provide responses to planning consultation requests. This to ensure that existing employment sites are not lost to alternative uses and to support applications which lead to the delivery of additional employment provision in East Devon.

2.16 Retaining the EDO position will ensure that future planning response requests are actioned in a timely manner. Losing this position may lead to such requests not being actioned, enabling controversial applications (potentially not compliant with the Local Plan) being approved, setting an adverse precedent for future applications of this nature. The EDO role will be important in strengthening employment and economic policies within the emerging Local Plan; in ensuring agreed policies are adhered to; and in ensuring

employment priorities are maintained for future new large developments in the district, such as the new town development being considered.

## **2.17 County Deal (2023-2027)**

2.18 The ongoing county devolution deal negotiations between central government and Devon, Plymouth and Torbay councils may lead to the establishment of a new non-mayoral combined authority. This combined authority will likely wield new powers from Government with a strong focus on economic development.

2.19 It is expected that the delivery of any new economic development initiatives will require input from the Economy teams at both lower and upper tiers of local government across Devon. This EDO role will be key to ensuring such initiatives can be delivered in East Devon. For example, the responsibility for developing a new investment plan for UKSPF2 could land with the combined authority, which will require a substantial degree of local input. The EDO can ensure that existing stakeholder groups (including the Local Partnership Group developed for the current round of UKSPF) can be utilised, as well as leading on any local delivery requirements.

## **3. Conclusion**

3.1 The EDO – Prosperity & Investment role has made a very significant contribution over the past 14 months. In the context of the challenges and opportunities ahead of us in resourcing delivery of a diverse programme of SPF projects alongside County Deal programmes, securing future funding and ongoing support to planning, it is important to ensure long term continuity in terms of this resource. The proposal to move the role from a fixed term to a permanent contract will secure this.

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### **Financial implications:**

The report is requesting to make permanent an economic development post. Funding is available in the current financial year supported from the Business Rates Pilot Reserve and the request is asking for a budget for 2023/24 in the order of £47k with on costs going forward. As outlined in the report this individual/position is instrumental in securing funding for the Council and the District.

### **Legal implications:**

The legal issues are covered in the report