

Report to: Scrutiny Committee



Date of Meeting 2 April 2026

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Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

UK Shared Prosperity Fund – Year 3 (2024/25) Evaluation

Report summary:

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) programme was a significant source of investment for East Devon, supporting local community initiatives and stimulating business growth. This report gives an overview of the UKSPF funded activity for 2024/25 and the key recommendations emerging from the Year 3 evaluation work.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

1. That Scrutiny Committee note the progress made on the actions identified in the January 2025 UKSPF Evaluation Report.
2. That Scrutiny Committee note the UKSPF evaluation undertaken for the 2024/25 financial year, along with the challenges identified and recommendation for future project management processes.

Reason for recommendation:

This report is intended to be provided on an annual basis to keep the Committee up to date on how our UKSPF funded activity is performing relative to our UKSPF Evaluation Strategy.

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

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

Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Medium Impact

Risk: Low Risk;

Links to background information [Cabinet Report](#) (13.07.22), [UKSPF Prospectus](#), [East Devon UKSPF Investment Plan](#), [UKSPF Year 1 Evaluations](#), [UKSPF Year 2 Evaluations](#), [UKSPF Year 3 Evaluations](#), and [East Devon UKSPF Evaluation Strategy](#).

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

Better homes and communities for all

A greener East Devon

A resilient economy

Executive Summary

- The UKSPF programme made a significant impact on communities and businesses in East Devon, from support for arts and culture initiatives, advice and guidance to businesses, and grants to boost productivity and decarbonise.
- Some recommendations from Year 1 and Year 2 evaluations have been implemented, but further work on organisational project management processes is required.
- The end of local growth funding in East Devon from 2026/27 is a significant loss to the district and threatens many initiatives started under UKSPF.
- Many of the key learnings from the evaluation can be taken forward through the council's new Programmes and Strategies service area, helping to support project managers even after the end of the UKSPF.

Background and Context

1.1 Over a three year period (from 2022/23 to 2024/25), EDDC managed £2.6m of local growth funding devolved from central government under the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Rural England Prosperity Fund. Internal evaluations have been undertaken on a yearly basis for each project funded, guided by the Evaluation Strategy approved by the UKSPF Programme Management Panel in July 2023.

1.2 Findings of the 2022/23 (Year 1) and 2023/2024 (Year 2) evaluations have previously been presented to the Scrutiny Committee. In January 2025, the committee noted the progress made on the actions identified in the Year 1 evaluations, and the challenges and proposed actions identified from the Year 2 evaluations.

1.3 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the implementation of actions proposed in the January 2025 report and to give an overview of the evaluations undertaken for 2024/25 (Year 3) activity.

1.4 A single extension year, at a reduced funding amount, for the UKSPF and REPF was announced in October 2024 for the 2025/26 financial year. This funding was allocated to the Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority (DTCCA), with Devon County Council taking on the role of Managing Organisation. East Devon was allocated £721,837 by the DTCCA for 2025/26. DCC have retained a £100k 'topslice' for monitoring and administration, which includes budget to carry out evaluation work. Members should note that this period (2025/26) is therefore

outside the scope of EDDC's evaluation work, with this report concluding evaluation activity for the UKSPF.

Programme Update

2.1 The list below provides some highlights of East Devon's UKSPF Programme over the three-year period. A full list of the outputs and outcomes achieved is available [online](#).

- 140 organisations in the voluntary and community sector supported through the [Council for Voluntary Service for East Devon](#).
- 153 organisations supported, 528 volunteering opportunities supported and 217 people attending training courses through the Cultural Programme (see the ACED network).
- 42 organisations awarded grants through the Creative East Devon Fund (CEDF), engaging over 7,000 people, supporting 28 local events, and creating 11 roles in the arts and culture sector.
- Over 25,000 participants in sports and leisure activities through the Leisure Programme, including specialist classes for residents recovering from illness and injury and an enhanced leisure offer for children. Funding has also gone to [supporting new volunteers](#) to complete their coaching qualification.
- 119 businesses supported through the Business Support Programme, including 39 entrepreneurs supported to start their own enterprises.
- 27 businesses awarded grants through the Innovation and Resilience Fund Rounds 2 and 3, including 4 farm businesses and 15 micro businesses. This led to the creation of 19 jobs.
- 51 organisations received grant funding to decarbonise through the Culture, Leisure, and Tourism Fund and the Carbon Action Fund. This is forecast to save almost 200 tonnes of carbon per year.
- 166 residents were supported to access education, employment, and training opportunities through the East Devon Employment Hub. This included 75 people who were economically inactive and 81 residents who identified as having a disability. Through the Hub, 28 individuals gained employment and 14 people benefited from a supported employment provision.
- The Retrofit Programme trained 136 residents across seven courses including Level 2 Retrofit and Introduction to Heat Pumps. Almost 1,000 school children across East Devon benefitted from extracurricular green skills activities, including sustainability workshops and innovation competitions.

2.2 The figures above reflect the outputs and outcomes achieved as of 31st March 2025, when the original UKSPF Programme concluded.

Actions from Year 2

3.1 Seven recommendations for future devolved funding programmes were outlined in the January 2025 report to Scrutiny Committee. It should be noted that many of these recommendations were given at a time when local government were expecting the allocation of local growth funding to be a long-term settlement. Given that the UKSPF programme has not been extended post-March 2026, many of these recommendations may no longer be relevant to UKSPF activity given the changing funding landscape. That said, these actions will still be relevant for similar programmes and projects in future, regardless of the funding source. Each of the recommendations are summarised below in bold, with any progress made towards implementation in the UKSPF Programme outlined:

3.2 A dedicated point of contact in the Legal Team should be assigned to provide guidance throughout the programme. Support was provided to help unlock the council's UKSPF allocation for 2025/26 (Year 4), but no dedicated 'single point of contact' was established during this time due to staff resourcing constraints in the Legal Team.

3.3 Provide clear and accessible guidance to project and programme managers on internal governance processes. This needs to be actioned at a corporate level to ensure clear guidance is provided to all staff. The recent creation of a new Project Management Office (PMO) and appointment of an Assistant Director for Programmes, Performance and Strategies will assist with this.

3.4 All proposed projects must have a consistent Project Lead, with their time on the project and any project management training requirements included within Service Plans and PERs. For Years 3 and 4, all projects had a consistent Project Lead, although no project management training was made available to those serving in this role. As with the above, the creation of a new PMO and the appointment of the Interim Assistant Director for Programmes, Performance and Strategies will assist with this.

3.5 Where suitable, projects within the programme should make use of standardised project management processes and document templates. Roll-out of formal project management processes is expected to result from the work occurring at an organisational level to standardise these across the Council. Some project specific actions have been realised. For example, standardised reporting templates have been issued to grant recipients across projects to reduce administrative burdens and ensure a parity in information received.

3.6 Institute a standardised approach for capturing qualitative feedback, such as template surveys or feedback forms. Microsoft Forms surveys were introduced in the Year 3 evaluation process, however eliciting responses from a good number of beneficiaries has remained a challenge. Further work with delivery partners is required to ensure qualitative feedback is gathered during the delivery period and the questions asked accurately capture the impact of support.

3.7 Provide benchmark numbers of beneficiaries for training sessions and cancel or reschedule where the number of sign-ups is well below this target to improve value for money. This has been actioned, with all projects delivering workshop or training sessions cancelling where uptake is insufficient. This has led to a shift to demand-led training, where workshops are scheduled in response to demand, rather than on pre-determined dates and topics. However, the discrepancy between sign-up and attendance numbers meant that low take-up of training opportunities remained a challenge in some instances.

3.8 Projects should be considered within the context of the whole programme, with complementary projects identified and joint working encouraged. There have been significant examples of joint working, particularly through the Culture and Tourism Programmes where Project Leads collaborated on projects including the Cultural Tourism Map and Screen Devon.

Year 3 Evaluations and Lessons Learnt

4.1 The UKSPF Programme progressed well in Year 3, with the majority of output and outcome targets met and 99.8% of the funding spent, with an underspend of just £22,390. The primary source of the underspend was the Business Support Programme, delivered by Devon County Council as part of 'Prosper', as funding was tied up in a procured contract that prevented underspend being redistributed prior to the end of March.

4.2 The main challenge experienced in the delivery of Year 3 was a change in government guidance regarding how MHCLG classified funding as 'spent'. This necessitated a budget swapping exercise, endorsed by [Cabinet in November 2024](#), where internal funding was used to continue UKSPF projects and UKSPF funding went towards EDDC-funded initiatives. This

prevented a significant underspend but created additional complexity within the programme. Only those projects outlined in the UKSPF Investment Plan have been evaluated, although some were enabled by UKSPF rather than directly funded by it.

4.3 Amendments made to grant schemes such as the Innovation and Resilience Fund and the development of the Carbon Action Fund were heavily informed by learnings from the Year 2 evaluations. The Year 3 evaluations showed clear positive impacts resulting from these changes, including increased application numbers and more streamlined schemes. This demonstrates the value of undertaking evaluation exercises during delivery, rather than just after it.

4.4 There were ongoing challenges in measuring some of the outcomes selected, which is partly attributable to the dispersal of a relatively small amount of funding over a large number of programmes and initiatives. Some outcomes could only be measured at the local authority level, but the amount of funding awarded to many projects was insufficient to create an impact visible at that scale.

4.5 Building in methods of assessing qualitative impact at the project design stage remains key to measuring the benefits of funded projects. Whilst the need for standardising the collection of qualitative data was highlighted in the Year 2 evaluation report, survey work undertaken in Year 3 emphasised the need for this to be integrated into the reporting process from the outset. Beneficiaries were hard to contact after support had ended and where delivery contracts did not require providers to measure qualitative impact, there was no obligation on delivery partners to collate and share this information.

4.6 Consideration of staff resource needs to extend beyond implementation into monitoring to robustly measure the longer-term impacts of funded projects. For the grant schemes run, staff resource was dedicated to monitoring the beneficiaries both throughout delivery of their projects and between 6 and 12 months following completion. This made it easier to evaluate those schemes compared to other UKSPF projects, as there was sufficient evidence available to draw conclusions on their impact.

Next Steps

5.1 All of the lessons learned, both at a project level and programme wide basis, will be collated and shared with the new Assistant Director for Programmes, Performance and Strategies. Although local growth funding is no longer available for many of the activities funded by the UKSPF, this learning can still be applied to other internally and externally funded projects and programmes moving forward.

5.2 In addition to embedding shared learning across the organisation, the new Programmes and Strategies service will help to conclude outstanding actions from the Year 2 evaluation. This includes:

- developing standardised project management processes and document templates;
- establishing a standardised approach for capturing qualitative feedback;
- better linking together projects with common aims and objectives; and
- helping to identify project management training requirements across the organisation.

Conclusion

6.1 The evaluation process for Year 3 has shown that the UKSPF programme had a significant impact, providing vital support to businesses, communities, and individuals across East Devon. Whilst some challenges in monitoring the outcomes achieved meant not all impacts could be quantified, the feedback from beneficiaries has been overwhelmingly positive and most target outputs achieved or exceeded.

6.2 The UKSPF Programme involved a high degree of cross-working between council teams and showed the importance of improving project management processes and ensuring sufficient staff resource was in place to manage and monitor projects. Overall, UKSPF funding supported a wide range of initiatives and represented a substantial investment in East Devon, and the end of local growth funding from 2026/27 onwards is a huge loss for the district. Despite this loss, the new Programmes and Strategies service will help to share learning and provide wider support to project managers, building on the positive legacy of the UKSPF longer term.

Financial implications:

The financial details are contained within the report and evidence the Council's compliance with the scheme conditions, which have been approved by the Council's S151 Officer in accordance with the set conditions.

Legal implications:

There are no substantive legal implications to be added to this report.

Appendix A – Year 3 Evaluation Reports

[All evaluations](#) produced for Year 3 activity can be found on our UKSPF webpages.



All Year 3 Evaluations
UKSPF .pdf

Appendix B – Grant Recipients Map

The map below shows the registered address of all businesses and organisations who received UKSPF or REPF grant funding across four schemes: the Innovation and Resilience Fund (IRF), the Culture, Leisure, and Tourism Fund (CLTF), the Carbon Action Fund (CAF), and the Creative East Devon Fund (CEDF).

The location of activity mostly correlates with the registered addresses of the beneficiaries, with the notable exception of some CEDF recipients. Although some organisations funded were not primarily based in East Devon, all activities supported were delivered wholly within East Devon.

Grant Scheme ● CAF ● CEDF ● CLTF ● IRF

All

