



WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

## WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Name and date of Committee	<b>CABINET – 16 NOVEMBER 2022</b>
Report Number	<b>AGENDA ITEM 7</b>
Subject	<b>RURAL ENGLAND PROSPERITY FUND</b>
Wards affected	ALL
Accountable member	Cllr Duncan Enright: Cabinet Member for Economic Development Tel:    Email: duncan.enright@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Will Barton: Business Development Officer Email: william.barton@westoxon.gov.uk  Claire Locke, Group Manager (Property and Regeneration) Email: claire.locke@publicagroup.uk
Summary/Purpose	To inform Cabinet of the Council's indicative allocation of funding under the Rural England Prosperity Fund, to seek in principle approval of the overall approach to use of that funding and to seek delegated authority to finalise the submission to Government which is due by 30th November.
Annexes	None
Recommendation/s	That Cabinet resolves to:  <i>a) Note the Council's indicative allocation of £716,216 from the Government's Rural England Prosperity Fund;</i>  <i>b) Approve the proposed approach to the use of the fund set out in this report;</i>  <i>c) Delegates authority to the Chief Executive to finalise the submission to Government in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the S151 Officer.</i>
Corporate priorities	Always refer to named priorities from the corporate plan.
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	NFU, the Local Nature Partnership and the Plunkett Foundation Local businesses, town and parish councils and rural organisations

## **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1.** On 3<sup>rd</sup> September, the Government published its prospectus for the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF). West Oxfordshire District Council has been indicatively allocated £716,216 over two years, starting in April 2023. Initial guidance is that 25% of the funds will be available for the financial year 2023/24 and 75% of the funds will be available for the financial year 2024/25.
- 1.2.** The Council has to submit a Local Investment Plan to the Government by 30 November 2022 setting out how it intends to use this funding.
- 1.3.** The fund is intended to be complementary to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), about which Cabinet received a report in July 2022. Cabinet may recall that the Council was allocated £1 million over three years ending in March 2025, and has submitted a UKSPF Investment Plan to the Government setting out how the Council proposes to spend the funding. At the time of writing, approval was still awaited from the Government.
- 1.4.** Whereas the UKSPF was a mix of revenue and capital, the REPF is purely capital. The fund is intended to succeed EU funding programmes such as LEADER and is designed to address the specific rural challenges of lower productivity, poorer connectivity and access to key services. It also encourages projects that contribute to net zero and nature recovery objectives.
- 1.5.** REPF has two distinct aims:
  - to help small businesses to develop new products and facilities that will be of benefit to the local economy
  - to provide new and improved community infrastructure
- 1.6.** These align with the UKSPF investment priorities of 'Supporting Local Business' and 'Communities and Place'.
- 1.7.** It is expected that REPF will be distributed via a grants programme which the Council will administer.
- 1.8.** The funding must be used in rural towns, villages and hamlets with a population of less than 10,000 people or in market or 'hub' towns which serve rural areas for employment and services, of up to 30,000 people. In effect this means the whole of the District is eligible for funding.
- 1.9.** The funding cannot be used for projects which have already received other DEFRA funding such as the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) fund, the Farming Investment Fund or the Platinum Jubilee Village Hall Fund. Grants cannot be used to fund domestic property improvements or to buy private vehicles.
- 1.10.** As with the UKSPF, spending from the REPF has to be aligned to 'interventions' with associated outputs and outcomes as set out in the REPF prospectus.

## **2. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT**

- 2.1.** The REPF prospectus encourages further stakeholder consultation. While conversations and advice have been taken from the NFU, the Local Nature Partnership and the Plunkett Foundation, the principle method for consulting has been a call for project ideas which has been promoted widely to businesses, town and parish councils and rural organisations. This

asks interested parties to submit details of potential projects which can then help shape our submission to Government.

- 2.2. The call for project ideas is not a formal application process and does not commit the Council to funding any projects. It is merely an exercise for the Council to understand the scope and scale of potential projects may come forward in a future application process and to help us to design the eligibility and selection criteria for our scheme accordingly.

### **3. PROPOSED APPROACH**

- 3.1. The proposed approach is to collate and analyse the project ideas submitted to understand the scale and scope of projects being worked on in the district. This will help us to design a grant scheme that makes the most effective use of the funding while delivering the best outputs in terms of REPF objectives and Council Plan priorities.
- 3.2. It is likely that we will not be able to fund all project ideas submitted through the call for ideas. Clear communication with these organisations will be really important to both manage their expectation and to direct them to other sources of funding and help where known.
- 3.3. The scheme would open for applications in 2023 with projects needing to be completed by the end of March 2025.

### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

- 4.1. The Council has been indicatively awarded £716,216 from the Rural England Prosperity Fund and must submit an Investment Plan to the Government setting out how it is proposed to be used. A 'Call for Project Ideas' is being undertaken and this will help to inform the plan and focus the eligibility and selection criteria for a grant scheme.
- 4.2. The Investment Plan needs to be submitted by 30 November with approval from the Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive and the S151 Officer. Delegated authority is requested to allow these three people to approve the Investment Plan before submission

### **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1. There are no direct financial implications at this stage but considerable officer time is likely to be required to manage both REPF and UKSPF schemes. Any unspent allocation will be returned to the Government at the end of each financial year.

### **6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1. The Council will need to enter into formal Grant Funding Agreements with the recipients of the funding.

### **7. RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 7.1. There is a risk that a call for projects will raise expectations that funding will be made available however this is being managed through clear communications.

### **8. EQUALITIES IMPACT (IF REQUIRED)**

- 8.1. N/A

**9. CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS (IF REQUIRED)**

- 9.1.** The REPF prospectus encourages projects that contribute to net zero and nature recovery objectives.

**10. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 10.1.** The Council could choose not to submit the addendum to the Local Investment Plan to the Government but this would mean it would not be able to draw down the indicative funding made available.

**11. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 11.1.** None

(END)