



WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Name and date of Committee	<b>Finance Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b> <b>14 June 2023</b>
Agenda Item	<b>Agenda Item 9</b>
Subject	<b>UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND</b>
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Duncan Enright, Executive Member for Economic Development Email: <a href="mailto:duncan.enright@westoxon.gov.uk">duncan.enright@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
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Report author	Will Barton, Business Development Officer Email: <a href="mailto:william.barton@westoxon.gov.uk">william.barton@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Summary/Purpose	To update members on the delivery of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund in West Oxfordshire
Annexes	Annex A – (insert title of document) Exempt Annex B – (any annex not to be made public must be titled as exempt)

Recommendation(s)	<i>That the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee resolves to:</i>  <i>1. Note the update provided</i>
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Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Putting Residents First</li><li>● A Good Quality of Life for All</li><li>● A Better Environment for People and Wildlife</li><li>● Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency</li><li>● Working Together for West Oxfordshire</li></ul>
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Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	Set out in the report

## 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) was launched in April 2022 and is part of the government’s Levelling Up agenda. It provides £2.6 billion of new funding for local investment by March 2025, with all areas of the UK receiving an allocation. The primary goal of the UKSPF is to build pride in place and increase life chances across the UK.
- 1.2 West Oxfordshire District Council has been allocated £1,000,000 of funding, with a spend profile set by the Government. This is set out in the table below:

### SPEND PROFILE

Financial year	22/23	23/24	24/25	Total
Total allocation	£70,467	£140,935	£788,598	£1,000,000
Min capital	£7,047	£18,321	£157,720	£183,088
Max revenue	£63,420	£122,614	£630,878	£816,912

- 1.3 The fund has three themes:
- communities and place;
  - supporting local business;
  - people and skills.
- 1.4 The fund can be used flexibly to support interventions across the three themes including grants to public or private organisations, commissioning third party organisations, procurement of service provision or in-house provision and loans (in “limited circumstances”). There is a prescribed set of interventions, outputs and outcomes from which the Council can select.
- 1.5 The Council had to submit an ‘Investment Plan’ in July 2022 setting out how the funds would be used in the district. The Plan identified the challenges the district faces and the opportunities to address these using the fund with interventions, outputs and outcomes from the list. The Investment Plan also set out our governance structure which includes a ‘Local Partnership’ comprising external stakeholders. A summary of the Investment Plan is attached at Annex A. This summary is available to the public on the Council’s website.

## 2. RURAL ENGLAND PROSPERITY FUND

- 2.1 In September 2022, the Government announced a Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF). WODC was allocated £716,216 over two years, starting in April 2023 with 25% of the funds available for the financial year 2023/24 and 75% of the funds available for the financial year

2024/25. REPF is intended to be complementary to UKSPF but whereas the UKSPF was a mix of revenue and capital, the REPF is purely capital.

**2.2** 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

**2.3** These align with the UKSPF investment priorities of ‘Supporting Local Business’ and ‘Communities and Place’.

**2.4** 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 potentially in scope.

**2.5** 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. Like UKSPF, the Council had to submit an Investment Plan to the Government by 30 November 2022 setting out how it intends to use this funding. Our Investment Plan was informed by an open call for project ideas. This helped our understanding of the types of projects that local communities were keen to work on.

**2.6** The administration of REPF sits within the same local governance structure that has been established to oversee WODC’s delivery of UKSPF.

**3. CURRENT SITUATION**

**3.1** The UKSPF Investment Plan was approved in January 2023 and the REPF Investment Plan was approved in April 2023.

**4. Year 1 projects**

**4.1** Our UKSPF Investment Plan included details of the five projects to be undertaken during year 1 (2022/23). All five sit within the Community and Place theme.

- Biodiversity toolkit
  - Working with Wild Oxfordshire to deliver a toolkit to help town and parish councils manage their land in a way that enhances its biodiversity. The project includes helping selected town and parish councils as pilots through the process to develop case studies. The selection criteria are being developed as part of the project and will ensure that a spread of different projects, areas of the district and a mix of urban and rural are included as pilots.
  - Project is underway
- Access to Deerpark South
  - Project to improve the accessibility of public land including installation of footbridges over streams.
  - Project is underway
- Rural services feasibility study

- The Plunkett Foundation were contracted to produce an audit of rural services in West Oxfordshire as well as recommendations for how the Council can help protect and enhance them using further UKSPF and REPF funds.
- Project just completed
- Market Towns feasibility study
  - Heartflood have been contracted to review the vitality of the district's town centres and make recommendations for how UKSPF and REPF can be used effectively to support and enhance them.
  - Project is underway and the report is due at the end of June.
- Carterton Town Centre Strategic Plan
  - This is a strategic piece of work looking for ways to address some of the key issues and opportunities in Carterton in the medium term. The work will also inform the new Local Plan.
  - The project is currently out to procurement – the specification for the work was developed in consultation with Carterton Town Council.

**4.2** The Year 1 projects are all effectively under way. Their start dates were all delayed by the late assessment of the Investment Plans so the projects will complete in Year 2. This is a scenario that is common to most council areas in the country.

## **5. Year 2 projects**

**5.1** The two Investment Plans set out the combined UKSPF and REPF spend profile for 2023/24 as follows (please note figures rounded):

<b>Theme</b>	<b>UKSPF</b>	<b>REPF</b>	<b>Total</b>
Community and Place	£80,000	£40,000	£120,000
Supporting Local Business	£60,000	£140,000	£200,000

**5.2** Projects under the Community and Place theme will be informed by the outcomes of the of the Rural Services and Market Towns feasibility studies as well as the information gathered during the REPF call for project ideas.

**5.3** Projects under the Supporting Local Business theme will be developed by the Business Support Working Group (see below).

## **6. Year 3 projects**

**6.1** The spend profile shows that the significant proportion of funding is available in Year 3 (financial year 2024/25). Projects that fit with the Skills & People and Business Support themes will need to fit with and complement existing initiatives, many of which are currently coordinated at a county level. Having discussed the approach with the Local Partnership, two working groups have been established to scope out and develop programmes to fit with these themes. Working group members include Abingdon and Witney College, OxLEP, Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce and the North East Cotswold Farmer Cluster.

## **7. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

7.1 UKSPF and REPF funds are allocated for district councils to administer within the scheme guidelines. The Investment Plans were compiled following local stakeholder consultation and the Council has a duty to deliver the schemes within the rigid timeframes.

## **8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 There is no duty for the Council to match UKSPF or REPF funds. 4% of the UKSPF funds can be used to help administer the scheme. West Oxfordshire has pooled this resource with the other Publica councils to cover the cost of a project officer to undertake the monitoring and reporting functions.

## **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 None other than identified elsewhere is this report.

## **10. RISK ASSESSMENT**

10.1 The key risk is not spending the allocated UKSPF and REPF funds within each financial year, at which point any underspend has to be returned to the Government.

10.2 The Government has accepted that underspend in year one was inevitable given the late start to the programme and councils were invited to submit 'credible plans' setting out how they would use the underspend. WODC's was submitted as requested. We cannot rely on similar flexibility at the end of 2023/24.

## **11. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

11.1 There are no specific impacts on any of the following protected groups:

- Race
- Disability
- Gender, including gender reassignment
- Age
- Sexual Orientation
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Religion or belief

## **12. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS**

12.1 None

## **13. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

13.1 None

(END)