

**STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL**  
**STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**  
**THURSDAY, 24 NOVEMBER 2022**

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) submission</b>			
<b>Purpose of Report</b>	To consider the draft REPF Addendum.			
<b>Decision(s)</b>	<b>The Committee RESOLVES to:</b> <b>a. Approve the development of the Rural England Prosperity Fund Addendum</b> <b>b. Approve the next steps and outlined plan prior to submission of the plan</b> <b>c. Delegate Authority to the Strategic Director of Resources, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of this committee, to finalise the grant scheme.</b>			
<b>Consultation and Feedback</b>	Consultation and discussions have taken place with members of the Strategic Leadership Team, Regeneration and Investment Board, town and parish councils, local businesses, business groups and Community Groups.			
<b>Report Author</b>	Amy Beckett, Senior Economic Development Specialist Email: amy.beckett@stroud.gov.uk			
<b>Options</b>	Option 1: to do nothing. This is not recommended as it would lead to the District not being able to draw down its share of the Rural England Prosperity Funding. Option 2: to agree or make amendments to Stroud Districts addendum and proposed interventions			
<b>Background Papers</b>	None			
<b>Appendices</b>	Appendix 1 – REPF Addendum Appendix 2 – REPF Grant eligibility and application form			
<b>Implications (further details at the end of the report)</b>	Financial	Legal	Equality	Environmental
	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

## 1. INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Further to the announcement of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), Stroud District has been awarded a further £400,000.00 through the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF). Similar to the UKSPF, the rural round of funding is a non-competitive funding stream, replacing European Funding that has previously been available. REPF is available to all rural Local Authorities who are set in rural locations; and each area is required to develop an addendum, outlining high level details on how the fund will be utilised over the funding period of 2023 – 2025.

- 1.2 At the time of writing we have received no updates from Central Government on our UKSPF Investment Plan so no updates can be given to the Committee on that project at this stage.
- 1.3 The Rural England Prosperity Fund will support the UKSPF priorities: Supporting Local Businesses and, Community and Place. The funding is available to provide additional support to rural areas and:
- Support new and existing rural businesses to develop new products and facilities that will be of a wider benefit to the local economy. This includes farm businesses looking to diversify income streams,
  - Supporting new and improved community infrastructure, providing essential community services and assets for local people and businesses to benefit the local economy.
- 1.4 The funding is available for rural locations as defined by DEFRA's rural area's Eligibility of parishes, for the purpose of this funding are:
- 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.
- 1.5 Stroud District has been awarded £400,000.00 REPF over the two-year funding period, this is capital funding only. Government have announced a split of funding across the two years, for Stroud District, this is outlined as follows:
- Year 1 (2023-24): £100,000.00
- Year 2 (2023-24): £300,000.00

## **2. ENGAGEMENT WITH PARTNERS**

- 2.1 As with the UKSPF, engagement with partners and communities that ensures the REPF is being utilised effectively across the area is expected. Partners from communities, businesses, parishes, neighbouring authorities, public sector organisations, skills providers and rural business support organisation have been engaged with. Partners have been met with on a one-to-one basis.
- 2.2 In addition to the external engagement, an officer group was formed, made up of colleagues across the UKSPF thematic areas, this included colleagues from the following areas: Leisure, Economic Development Planning Strategy, The Canal Team, The 2030 Team, The Museum Team, Community Health and Wellbeing, and Regeneration.
- 2.3 When meeting with both internal and external partners, understanding their opinion on the needs of the district was important. Spending time ensuring the recommended method of spend would be best suited for the widest range of business and community organisations was essential. Furthermore, gaining an understanding of what other funding streams are available and removing any duplicate funding opportunities was carried out.

- 2.4 Conversations are taking place across the County with all Rural Local Authorities, each are looking to utilise the funding as a capital grants programme. Enquiries have been made to understand if the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) would be able to administer the grants on behalf of all four areas.
- 2.5 Both MPs within the District have had written briefings on the progress of SDC's addendum.

### **3. OUR PRIORITIES**

- 3.1 When government first announced the UK Shared Prosperity Funding, officers carried out a mapping exercise to understand how the priorities of the funding matched with Council priorities. The Rural England Prosperity Funding further supports the priorities of the UKSPF and aligns with priorities from:
- 3.1.1 SDC Council Plan;
  - 3.1.2 CN 2030 Strategy;
  - 3.1.3 Emerging Cultural Strategy;
  - 3.1.4 Canal Projects priorities;
  - 3.1.5 Economic Development Strategy;
  - 3.1.6 Leisure and Wellbeing Strategy;
  - 3.1.7 Museum in the Park Policies;
  - 3.1.8 Physical Activity Strategy
- 3.2 As outlined with the UKSPF investment plan, the need to support our businesses and communities with the ongoing cost of living crisis remains an immediate priority. The pressures for community organisations to offer safe, warm and trusted space is as essential as ever. Further to this we are continually seeking ways to support businesses as they manage increased supply chain and energy costs.
- 3.3 In order to best meet the needs of our businesses and communities it is proposed that the Council administer a grants scheme to allocate individual grants to businesses and community groups. This will be in line with the priorities of both the Council and the REPF.
- 3.4 Following on from considerations as to how best to manage the rural funding and the fair awarding of grants, we are proposing the grant allocation is open both businesses and communities as an even split.
- 3.5 As with the UKSPF, it remains an ongoing priority that funding is fairly distributed across the District. Through the REPF, officers will continue to ensure funding is distributed evenly across eligible areas.
- 3.6 To deliver fair distribution of the REPF grant programme the following will take place:
- 3.6.1 Marketing of the fund focussed to areas of the District that are eligible for funding, as per DEFRA's rural area definition.
  - 3.6.2 Monitoring of take up per parish location, allowing opportunities to notify businesses and community organisations where uptake is low.

#### **4. REPF Grant Governance**

- 4.1 The funding is available to support businesses and communities within rural locations and is to be spent on capital projects only and will run for the duration of the funding years. The grants will be available to businesses and community organisations that meet the eligibility criteria set out in appendix 2.
- 4.2 The successful applications will have evidenced good value for money for the grant amount drawn down in comparison to the outputs that will be met. The outputs have been defined by central government; these are outlined the Appendix 1, within the REPF addendum.
- 4.3 The grants will be assessed by an officer group who will score against the allocation criteria. This will be agreed by the Strategic Director of Resources, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee.
- 4.4 Regular updates on marketing of the REPF, grants allocated and spend will be shared with Strategy and Resources Committee.

#### **5. NEXT STEPS**

- 5.1 Following on from committee, there is time to ensure comments can be included, prior to the addendum being submitted. Submission of the REPF Addendum is by 30<sup>th</sup> November 2022. The REPF Addendum is available in appendix 1.
- 5.2 Following submission of the Addendum, government will approve the plans and award the first year's funding. Approval of the REPF submission is confirmed as January 2023, with the fund being available from April 2023.
- 5.3 Prior to the funding being made available to the District Council, the grant process, criteria, and application form will be finalised. This will include ensuring the grants meet the requirements of the funding whilst meeting the priorities of the district, the communities, and the businesses.

#### **6. IMPLICATIONS**

##### **6.1 Financial Implications**

All funding for the grant scheme is provided by Central Government. Administration costs will be met from the 4% allowance to be claimed from the primary UKSPF.

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##### **6.2 Legal Implications**

The Fund will be governed by detailed government guidance and care must be taken to ensure that all of the requirements of the scheme are complied with and actioned accordingly to reduce and mitigate risks.

Legal advice should be taken when the terms and conditions of the funding become available and in the preparation of the process for awarding grant funding to businesses and community organisations.

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### **6.3 Equality Implications**

Equality implications were considered at the time of submitting the UK Shared Prosperity Funding Investment Plan. The same considerations will be made for the REPF, as an addendum to the UKSPF.

### **6.4 Environmental Implications**

As outlined in section 3.1 of this report, the REPF has the potential to align strongly with a number of key SDC plans which have positive environmental ambitions, such as the Council Plan, 2030 Strategy, Economic Development Strategy and the canal regeneration project and wider strategy.

The assessment of any future applications for REPF will include consideration of their likely environmental impact and contribution to key SDC plans.