



DATE:	27 th March 2024
SUBJECT:	Award under the UK Shared Prosperity Fund People and Skills Round Two - Boston College Restart, Recruit, Upskill
PURPOSE:	To detail the decision to award People & Skills UK Shared Prosperity Funding to Boston College in line with commitments made through Boston Borough's submitted Investment Plan for UK Shared Prosperity and Rural Prosperity Funding.
KEY DECISION:	Yes
PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	Councillor Anne Dorrian (Leader of Boston Borough Council)
REPORT OF:	Matthew Hogan – Assistant Director (Strategic Growth and Development)
REPORT AUTHOR:	Charli Baty – Senior Programme Officer (UK Shared Prosperity Fund) and Saul Farrell – Senior Programme Manager (UK Shared Prosperity Fund)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	All
EXEMPT REPORT?	No

SUMMARY

This paper details the delegated decision taken to award funds of £63,993 to Boston College – Restart, Recruit, Upskill Project under both the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural Prosperity Fund Programmes. The "Restart, Recruit, Upskill" project is focussed on tackling economic inactivity through engagement with employers and the development of residents' skills. Aligned with the Greater Lincolnshire and Rutland Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), the project will provide 250 training places to individuals seeking employment in priority sectors like fresh food, food processing, logistics, construction, and the visitor economy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) To award funds of £63,993 to Boston College for the Restart, Recruit, Upskill Project.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

Considerations and conclusions for this investment are made within the text of this report, including the options appraisal below.

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Option 1 - Proceed as per the recommendation of this Report.

Under this option, funds will be allocated to the Boston College - Restart, Recruit, Upskill Project. This will support the realisation of the benefits set out within the report below and allow the council to effectively allocate a substantial proportion of its available Prosperity Funding on an impactful, targeted local project.

Option 2 – Do nothing.

Under this option, the recommendations are not taken forward and grants are not made available, the benefits to the development of residents' skills will not be realised. The gains in economic growth, productivity growth and living standards arising from this project would be at risk. Consequently, the benefits set out within the report will not be obtained. This also increases the risk of not distributing adequate UKSPF funding to strong projects that meet our commitments to central government and consequently, raising the risk of a return of funding to government.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Launching at the end of January 2023, Boston Borough Council has been awarded a significant allocation of UK Shared Prosperity and Rural Prosperity Funding (2.456m, less administration). This allocation was based on an Investment Plan which was submitted in the preceding year to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), which was itself based on an extensive consultation with local communities and elected Members.
- 1.2 In line with our approved Investment Plan and DLUHC guidance, funding has been split equally across three themes:
 - Communities and Place – Supporting pride in place, improving residents' experiences of their communities.
 - Supporting Local Businesses – Supporting local businesses to grow and local productivity, supporting employment growth.
 - People & Skills – Reducing economic activity, supporting employment growth and improving the skills of adult learners (to be delivered in Financial Year 2023-4).

1.3 The expectation, legally embodied within our contract (Memorandum of Understanding) for funding from DEFRA and DLUHC, is that investments made by Local Authorities directly address the contracted outcomes within the agreed Investment Plan. They must also generate additionality – new activity in the local area rather than the replication of pre-existing service provision. They also stipulate that all projects commissioned must be delivered by the end of March 2025.

1.4 The allocation of funding of both UKSPF and Rural Prosperity Fund received for Boston Borough Council, less administration (currently at 7.3%, which is within DLUHC guidelines for administration), is as follows:

Category	Capital	Revenue
Communities and Place	£354,094	£653,902
Supporting Local Business	£354,094	£653,902
People & Skills	£43,913	£396,278

1.5 The People & Skills Programme was initially allocated for delivery in Financial Year 2024-5 only. This is a very short period to fund, contract and deliver an ambitious skills Programme that will generate the outcomes required by the Council's agreed Investment Plan. Recognising this, at the commencement of Financial Year 2023-4, DLUHC revised national guidance to enable UKSPF Programmes to utilise funding allocations for other themes to 'bring forward' a limited number of People & Skills interventions. However, the Council decided to maintain the original plan for the delivery of this sub-Programme for the following reasons:

- The high levels of demand experienced within both the Supporting Local Business and Communities and Place sub-Programmes suggesting that the allocation of funds should be used for those interventions in that year at the scale originally intended. Events have proven this strategy both prescient and prudent: the rapid and effective delivery of both sub-Programmes has meant that financially, spend has exceeded the highest target band set by DLUHC for FY 23-24 in both themes (80%).
- As People and Skills is an entirely new Programme, it required a full project and policy design process, including a further programme of consultation with specialist stakeholders (for example, DWP, FE Colleges and Independent Training Providers (ITPs), to ensure that the Council had an effective, coherent Programme which addressed gaps in provision within the employment and skills market.

1.6. Despite this short window for delivery, the UKSPF Programme Team committed to designing, consulting upon, launching, awarding and contracting all of the available funds by the end of April 2024. This was principally to ensure that providers had the maximum possible window for delivery. The Service looks set to achieve this objective, with this decision forming part of a wider, Partnership-wide £1.8m programme of investment in People & Skills.

2. DETAILS OF THE PROJECT

- 2.1 A key priority, expressed both by elected Members and by communities upon extensive consultation, is ensuring that UKSPF/RPF funding supports communities that have been historically under-represented in the provision of public investment and that investment targets high levels of economic inactivity, providing new opportunities for residents of all ages to find and maintain fulfilling work in our key local sectors.
- 2.2 Applying in Round Two of the People & Skills Programme, Boston College (a large, established local Further Education (FE) provider) submitted an application for a significant project targeted at reducing economic inactivity across the South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership (SELCP) area entitled 'Restart, Recruit, Upskill'. This project progressed through the agreed UKSPF grant appraisal structure for People & Skills (Specialist Grants Panel, Partnership Sub-Group, Portfolio Holder, Decision-Maker), resulting in a recommendation for approval which was signed off in principle this week.
- 2.3 Aligned with the Greater Lincolnshire and Rutland Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), the Restart, Recruit, Upskill project will provide 250 training places to individuals across the Partnership area (around 59 in Boston Borough) seeking employment in priority sectors like fresh food, food processing, logistics, construction, and the visitor economy. This training will be based on a model of participants undertaking an NQF-accredited qualification (Entry to L3), receiving 'wrap around' support to find employment (for example, through CV writing) and being offered a guaranteed job interview with a named local employer. The project will actively embed digital skills and utilise a combination of online and blended learning, facilitated workshops, and taught sessions to accommodate learning preferences and enhance participation.
- 2.4 This project, through targeting economically inactive participants, addresses a key strategic priority for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund Programme in Boston Borough. It also meets the ongoing demand of employers for skilled applicants to entry and technical level roles. It will specifically focus on delivering provision which is not currently possible through the existing AEB themes and allocations, addressing a 'gap' which currently exists in the local skills market.
- 2.5 One of the project's strengths is that it will unlock the delivery of skills provision in rural locations, addressing the key strategic challenge of access to learning in these areas identified as a priority in the UKSPF Prospectus for our District. The project will be delivered through a series of rural hubs, including Boston College itself and for hospitality, a mobile vehicle will be purchased to deliver food hygiene, culinary, customer service and barista training for residents in rural areas. This approach will support the growth of the visitor economy in village locations by increasing the number of skilled hospitality professionals who are able to deliver high-quality services to tourists and visitors. This will address a major local recruitment challenge faced by one of our area's key sectors, give residents the skills to start their own business in this sector and in so doing, it will hopefully provide a model of how flexible rural skills provision can be delivered 'in place', accessible to residents.

CONCLUSION

3.1 Recommendation: To proceed upon the basis of awarding £63,993 to Boston College through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund for the delivery of their Restart, Recruit, Upskill Project

EXPECTED BENEFITS TO THE PARTNERSHIP

These recommendations will allow the Partnership to meet the commitments that it has given to DLUHC through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. It will also meet the key political commitment of using UKSPF funding to expand access to skills provision across the Partnership area, including in some of the most rural communities. By awarding a grant at this scale, the provider will also realise significant economies of scale in delivery, enabling them to reach more residents across the Partnership for a lower cost.

IMPLICATIONS

SOUTH AND EAST LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCILS PARTNERSHIP

None

CORPORATE PRIORITIES

None

STAFFING

None

CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

This is a Delegated decision, made by the Assistant Director (Strategic Growth and Development) in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder and in this specific case, the Leader of the Council. The funding for the scheme has already been provided by Central Government and accepted by the Council, and forms part of the councils approved budget.

DATA PROTECTION

None

FINANCIAL

The combined allocation of £63,993 in UK Shared Prosperity Funding and Rural Prosperity Funding from the 'People and Skills' Theme.

RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk management shall be undertaken within the context of the contract management process. The applicant produced a risk register through the application process and this is being kept under review. The three key risks are as follows:

- Timescale – To mitigate the risk associated with timescales in the Restart, Recruit, Upskill project a proactive and strategic recruitment plan will be implemented. This plan will focus on expediting the hiring process for project roles, ensuring a streamlined approach to identifying, selecting, and onboarding qualified individuals.

- Failure to recruit project beneficiaries – To mitigate the risk of failing to successfully engage the required number of project beneficiaries, a multifaceted approach will be implemented. Targeted and extensive outreach campaign, leveraging various communication channels to raise awareness about the programme benefits and opportunities. Existing networks with local stakeholder including employment agencies, community organisations will be approached as well as arranging customised information sessions and workshops to provide clear insight into the Programme.
- Failure to secure hospitality demonstrational vehicle – To mitigate the risk of not securing a hospitality demonstrational vehicle for the delivery of the Restart, Recruit, Upskill project, the project team will establish clear communication channels with potential vehicle suppliers to ensure timely updates on availability and negotiate flexible terms to accommodate unforeseen circumstances.

• **STAKEHOLDER / CONSULTATION / TIMESCALES**

This project was assessed in March 2024 through the agreed UKSPF/RPF Assessment process. This has included the following:

- Processed through an internal Panel of Economic Development Officers, including the UK Shared Prosperity Fund Programme Team.
- Consultation with the People and Skills Grant Panel
- Consultation within the Boston Borough Locality Partnership Group.
- Consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder
- Consultation with Senior Leadership Team within the South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership

REPUTATION

No specific reputational risks arising in this case. However, there is a substantial reputational risk associated with not committing UKSPF/RPF funding in a timely manner and to high quality projects that meet the outcomes that the Local Authority has committed to within the UKSPF/RPF Investment Plan, such as this one. At a project level, under-delivery is likely to carry substantial reputational risk and this will be managed closely through the contract management process.

CONTRACTS

The project will be managed through a UKSPF/RPF Grant Funding Agreement, which will be managed by a designated grant funding contract manager within the Local Authority, situated within the UKSPF/RPF Programme Team.

CRIME AND DISORDER

None

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY/ HUMAN RIGHTS/ SAFEGUARDING

The council has considered equalities, diversity and inclusion in formulating this recommendation, including compliance with relevant legislation. This includes protected characteristics under the 2010 Equalities Act and subsequent amendments. Potential projects were required to submit an Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) statement, as well as a plan for the recruitment and

retention of participants (with a specific focus on enabling participants in rural communities to access skills provision and enabling those who face barriers to access to participate). This plan and statement was considered as part of the assessment process for funding. Upon review of these documents, it is anticipated that this intervention is likely to have a positive impact on improving access to skills and training for those who have protected characteristics, as defined by the 2010 Equalities Act.

HEALTH AND WELL BEING

None arising at the macro-level, though individual benefits may be realised through projects grant-aided by the scheme on a delegated basis.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

None

LINKS TO 12 MISSIONS IN THE LEVELLING UP WHITE PAPER

MISSIONS	
This paper contributes to the follow Missions outlined in the Government's Levelling Up White paper.	
Skills	By 2030, the number of people successfully completing high-quality skills training will have significantly increased in every area of the UK. In England, this will lead to 200,000 more people successfully completing high-quality skills training annually, driven by 80,000 more people completing courses in the lowest skilled areas.
Wellbeing	By 2030, well-being will have improved in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing.
Pride in Place	By 2030, pride in place, such as people's satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community, will have risen in every area of the UK, with the gap between the top performing and other areas closing.

ACRONYMS

DLHUC – Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

APPENDICES	
None	
APPENDIX A	(Title of document)
APPENDIX B	(Title of document)
APPENDIX C	(Title of document)

BACKGROUND PAPERS

(If none then insert the working 'No background papers as defined in Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the production of this report.' Also delete the below text/boxes.)

Background papers used in the production of this report are listed below: -

Document title	Where the document can be viewed
UKSPF Prospectus	https://www.e-lindsey.gov.uk/article/23065/UK-Shared-Prosperity-Fund
UKSPF People & Skills Prospectus	https://www.boston.gov.uk/article/25030/People-Skills-UK-Shared-Prosperity-Fund

CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY OF THIS REPORT

A report on this item has not been previously considered by the Council.

REPORT APPROVAL

Report author:	Charli Baty – Senior Programme Officer (UK Shared Prosperity Fund/Rural Prosperity Fund) Saul Farrell - Senior Programme Manager (UK Shared Prosperity Fund/Rural Prosperity Fund)
Signed off by:	Matthew Hogan Assistant Director – Strategic Growth and Development
Approved for publication:	N/A

CHECKLIST - DELETE BEFORE SUBMISSION TO DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

S151 Officer consulted on financial implications:	Yes / No / NA
Monitoring Officer consulted on legal and constitutional implications:	Yes / No / NA
Portfolio Holder consulted:	Yes / No / NA
Ward Member consulted:	Yes / No / NA