
Subject:	RURAL ENGLAND PROSPERITY FUND (REPF)
Meeting and Date:	Cabinet – 7 November 2022
Report of:	Christopher Townend, Head of Investment, Growth and Tourism
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Trevor Bartlett, Leader of the Council
Decision Type:	Executive Key Decision
Classification:	Unrestricted

Purpose of the report: To update Cabinet on the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) and to seek agreement for the delivery of the project.

Recommendation: Cabinet is requested to:

1. Note the REPF Prospectus and confirm agreement to the proposed fund allocation as set out in the report.
2. Delegate authority and authorise the Strategic Director (Place and Environment), in consultation with the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance, Digital and Climate Change, to take the necessary decisions and actions required to:
 - draw up and submit an investment plan;
 - accept the allocation of funds;
 - administer the scheme; and
 - complete the required returns to Government.

1. **Summary**

1.1. This report seeks Cabinet agreement to accept Dover District Council's allocation from the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) and the proposal to work with local stakeholders to produce an investment plan and manage the project through to completion.

2. **Introduction and Background**

2.1. On 6 June 2022 Cabinet approved a paper on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) which provides £2.6 billion of funding for local investment by March 2025. The Council has been allocated £1m from the UKSPF to spend over a three-year period.

2.2. The Council has since received a further communication from Defra advising that it has been allocated an additional £400,000 for a new scheme called the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF).

2.3. The REPF is a top-up to the UKSPF and is available to eligible local authorities in England. It succeeds EU funding from LEADER and the Growth Programme which were part of the Rural Development Programme for England..

- 2.4. The aim of the scheme is to support the UK government's Levelling Up commitment through two investment priorities:
- Communities and place
 - Supporting local business
- 2.5. Definition of rural
- 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
- 2.6. The £400K allocation will be split over two years from April 2023 to March 2025. Any underspend must be returned.
- 2023/24: £100,000
 - 2024/25: £300,000
- 2.7. All spend must be on capital projects in the following fields:
- business development
 - farm business diversification
 - community infrastructure
- 2.8. Unlike UKSPF which is administered by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), the REPF is being administered by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra).
- 2.9. The time frame for the REPF is as set out below:

Scheme launch	3 September 2022
Prospectus launch	12 September 2022
Webinar	22 September 2022
Investment plan submission	3 October 2022 to 30 November 2022
First payment	April 2023
Funding period	April 2023 to March 2025

3. Investment Plan

- 3.1. In order to access the REPF, the Council is required to complete a short template, as an addendum to the UKSPF investment plan. This needs to set out how the Council will use the funding and to justify these plans by explaining:
- which interventions it wishes to use and how they will address local rural challenges and opportunities.
 - what outcomes the interventions are expected to achieve.
 - how the Council:
 - a) intends to select projects;
 - b) will ensure value for money is delivered; and
 - c) will determine that projects cannot be funded by private finance.
- 3.2. Local authorities are encouraged to work with other places on specific interventions, but collaboration isn't mandatory.

- 3.3. Local authorities are required to engage with local rural stakeholders (including MPs) or expand the UKSPF local partnership group and detail how future engagement will take place.

4. Reporting

- 4.1. There will be a formal reporting request every six months, with qualitative updates on a more frequent basis also required.
- 4.2. Local authorities must carry out evaluations of each intervention to demonstrate the effectiveness.
- 4.3. Local authorities could be asked to consider staggering interventions to allow the administrators to exploit differences in timing of roll out to learn more about impacts.

5. Proposal

- 5.1. As can be seen from the document included at Appendix C (Rural England Prosperity Fund: interventions, objectives, outputs and outcomes), the REPF can be used to support a wide range of investment priorities.
- 5.2. Officers have therefore reviewed the examples provided within the document and seek Cabinet guidance on the following proposed use of the funding, although clearly a whole range of options exist, bearing in mind that the REPF funds are limited to £400k.:
 - To introduce a 'capital' grant scheme for enable Parish Councils to install, upgrade or refurbish local amenities such as village halls, play areas and pavilions.
 - To seek applications from rural businesses for capital works that support the provision of net zero infrastructure, such as installing solar panels, EV charging points etc.
 - To upgrade the Council's historic information panels
- 5.3. It is proposed that applications for funding be reviewed by the Strategic Director (Place & Environment) in consultation with the Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance, Digital and Climate Change.

6. Risks

- 6.1 The annual allocation must be spent within each financial year - if projects cannot be implemented within the timeline given the project owner would need to fund the project themselves.

7. Options

- 7.1 Option 1: Accept the proposals as outlined in paragraph 5 above. This option is recommended as it will ensure that Council's use of the REPF supports a wide range of investment priorities and projects that will make a positive difference across the rural areas of Dover District. **This is the recommended option.**
- 7.2 Option 2: Amend the proposals set out in paragraph 5. This is an acceptable alternative to the recommended option so long as the proposals selected meet the REPF requirements in terms of interventions, objectives, outputs and outcomes.
- 7.3 Option 3: Do nothing. If an Investment Plan is not submitted no funds will be allocated to the Council for the REPF. This is not recommended as there would be no benefit to Dover District.

8. Resource Implications

- a. The allocated £400k is not currently in the Special Revenue programme but can be added once the report has been approved.
- b. Delivery of the REPF will require significant staff resources from the Investment, Growth & Tourism Department, as well as other Council departments such as Community, Climate Change, Legal, Procurement, Accountancy, Facilities Management, Regulatory Services, Environmental Protection and Property services.

9. Climate Change and Environmental Implications

- a. The proposed use of some of the REPF funds to support the provision of net zero infrastructure would have a positive impact on the District's response to the Climate change emergency. All environmental impacts will be fully considered as part of all related REPF interventions.

10. Corporate Implications

- a. Comment from the Strategic Director (Resources): Accountancy has been consulted and has no further comment. (DL)
- b. Comment from the Solicitor to the Council: The Solicitor to the Council has been consulted in the preparation of this report and has no further comments to make.
- c. Comment from the Equalities Officer: This report regarding the Rural England Prosperity Fund does not specifically highlight any equality implications, however in discharging their duties members are required to comply with the public sector equality duty as set out in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/149>.

11. Appendices

Appendix A; [Rural England Prosperity Fund: interventions, objectives, outputs and outcomes](#)

12. Background Papers

- [Rural England Prosperity Fund Prospectus](#)
- [UK Shared Prosperity Fund Prospectus](#)

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