



Subject:	Shared Prosperity Fund – proposed funding approach
Date:	20 September 2024
Reporting Officer:	Damien Martin, Strategic Director, Place and Economy Sinead Grimes, Director of Property and Projects
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Restricted Reports									
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>								
<p>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</p> <p>Insert number <input type="checkbox"/></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime 									
<p>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</p> <table style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 70%;">After Committee Decision</td> <td style="width: 30%;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>After Council Decision</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sometime in the future</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Never</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>		After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>	Never	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Never	<input type="checkbox"/>								

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on a funding opportunity through the UK Government’s Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) and to get agreement on a number of priority activities for inclusion in the funding application.

2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the proposal by UK Government to make an allocation of £9.85million to councils under the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF), for spend to take place by 31 March 2025 • Note that there will be a ring-fenced allocation of £1,787,615 for Belfast City Council • Agree the indicative list of priority activities for inclusion in the funding application.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p>In 2022, the UK Government’s DLUHC (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) confirmed that Shared Prosperity Fund resources of around £127million would be available in Northern Ireland over the financial years 2022/23; 2023/24 and 2024/25). The funding was structured around three priority areas, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting Local Business – funding stream under which the Northern Ireland Enterprise Support Service “Go Succeed” is funded – (£17million budget) as well as targeted support for key growth sectors and female enterprise to be led by Invest NI • People and Skills – funding allocated via an open call for projects, with 18 projects receiving funding totalling £58million as well as additional funding for numeracy skills (“Multiply”) of around £6million to be distributed through the Labour Market Partnerships • Communities and Place – initial funding of £1million allocated to 11 councils for expenditure by March 2023.
3.2	<p>At the April meeting of the Northern Ireland SPF Partnership Group (the overall steering group for the SPF funding), DLUHC advised that they were considering plans for the allocation of remaining funding of £9.85million and sought views on a number of options. Their preferred option was to allocate all resources to councils under the “Communities and Place” theme via a ring-fenced call for projects.</p>
3.3	<p>Following that meeting, DLUHC officials presented this advice to Ministers. However given the election announcement at the end of May, this proposal was not signed off for some time. On 23 August 2024, all councils received correspondence confirming the UK Government’s intention to proceed with the ring-fenced call for funding, open to the 11 local authorities.</p>
3.4	<p>Subsequently, information on the proposed approach, timelines and level of funding available under the fund have been shared. Funding has been allocated on a per capita basis. For Belfast, this means that there is a budget of £1,787,615. SPF runs until end March 2025 so all expenditure must be incurred by this point. However the SPF management team have advised that they will accept eligible expenditure from 1 April 2024</p>

– meaning that we can use this funding for activities that are already under way (and therefore use council resources on other schemes). Eligible activities can include:

- Funding for improvements to town centres and high streets, including improved accessibility for those with disabilities
- Funding for new, or improvements to existing, community and neighbourhood infrastructure projects
- Creation of and improvements to local green spaces and community gardens
- Enhanced support for existing cultural, historic and heritage organisations that make up the local cultural heritage offer/support for local arts, cultural heritage and creative activities
- Support for active travel measures
- Funding for development and promotion of wider campaigns which encourage people to visit and explore the local area.

3.5

Following the formal confirmation of the fund, officers have been working to identify relevant projects for inclusion as part of the Belfast City Council application. We have undertaken a review of programmes and engaged with teams across the council to identify projects that can meet the eligibility criteria. Following a preliminary round of engagement, we have worked at speed through a long list to a short list of projects that:

- Might allow us to free up resources for other activity
- Are under way and will comfortably meet spend timeframes
- Have not yet started but have approvals/routes to market that will ensure spend by end March 2025
- Enable us to bring forward work that had been identified as priority but did not have dedicated resources assigned.

3.6

As a result of this exercise, the following projects are being proposed for submission:

Project	Indicative budget
Pitch improvements work	£460,000
Playgrounds improvement work	£660,000
Vacant to Vibrant scheme	£200,000
Feasibility studies for key city centre sites and assets	£200,000
Programme of animation, lighting enhancements and marketing linked to key city events (e.g. Halloween, Christmas)	£260,000

3.7

Given the late confirmation of funding, the SPF team has requested that councils submit funding applications by 19 September and have confirmed their intention to proceed with project assessments by early October, with funding to follow shortly afterwards. They are aware that some councils may require formal endorsement of their final funding application so they are prepared to work with councils in the knowledge that funding packages are in principle only until there is appropriate council sign-off.

3.8	<p>While SPF funding is only guaranteed until 31 March 2025, it is understood that the UK Government is currently working on options for what happens next, following this date. One option under discussion is an extension of activity for one year i.e. from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026. This would allow for some development work by the new government to consider what an appropriate replacement to Levelling Up might look like. If this was the case, it may mean that a further allocation of funding might be made available for eligible activity in 2025/26 financial year – although this is not currently guaranteed.</p> <p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p>
3.9	<p>A financial allocation of £1,787,615 will be provided to Belfast City Council to undertake an agreed programme of work. This can be managed within existing staff resources.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment</u></p>
3.10	<p>All proposed activities will be or have been equality screened.</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	None