



Council name	COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	CABINET 7 NOVEMBER 2022
Report Number	AGENDA ITEM 11
Subject	RURAL ENGLAND PROSPERITY FUND
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Cllr Tony Dale, Cabinet Member for Economy and Transformation Email: tony.dale@cotswold.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Paul James, Economic Development Lead Email: paul.james@cotswold.gov.uk Claire Locke, Group Manager (Property and Regeneration) Email: claire.locke@publicagroup.uk
Summary/Purpose	To inform Cabinet of the Council's indicative allocation of funding under the Rural England Prosperity Fund, to seek in principle approval of the overall approach to use of that funding and to seek delegated authority to finalise the submission to Government which is due by 30 th November.
Annexes	None
Recommendation(s)	That Cabinet resolves to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>a) note the Council's indicative allocation of £764,292 from the Government's Rural Prosperity Fund;</i> <i>b) approve the proposed approach to the use of the fund set out in Section 4 of this report;</i> <i>c) delegate authority to the Chief Executive to finalise the submission to Government in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economy and Transformation.</i>
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Responding to the challenges presented by the climate crisis ● Helping residents and communities access the support they need for good health and wellbeing ● Supporting businesses to grow in a green, sustainable manner, and



	to provide high value jobs
Key Decision	YES
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	Cabinet, Senior Management. Gloucestershire Rural Community Council, Cotswold National Landscape, Cotswold Economic Advisory Group, Farm491, Royal Agricultural University.

BACKGROUND

- 1.1 On 3rd September, the Government published its prospectus for the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF). Cotswold District Council has been indicatively allocated £764,292 over two years, starting in April 2023. It is fair to say that the announcement of funding, whilst very welcome, was unexpected. The Council has to make a submission to the Government by 30th November 2022 setting out how it intends to use this funding.
- 1.2 The fund is intended to be complementary to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), about which Cabinet received a report in July 2022. Cabinet may recall that the Council was allocated £1 million over three years, ending in March 2025, and has submitted a 'Local Investment Plan' to the Government setting out how the Council proposes to spend the funding. At the time of writing, approval was still awaited from the Government.
- 1.3 Whereas the UKSPF was a mix of revenue and capital, the REPF is purely capital. It is intended to succeed EU funding programmes LEADER and the Growth Fund, which was part of the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE).
- 1.4 The fund is designed to address the specific rural challenges of lower productivity, poorer connectivity and access to key services. These align with the UKSPF investment priorities of 'Supporting Local Business' and 'Communities and Place'. The funding is provided to support new and existing small businesses to develop new products and facilities that will be of benefit to the local economy and to provide new and improved community infrastructure.
- 1.5 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 eligible for funding.

- 1.6 The funding cannot be used for projects which have already received other DEFRA funding, such as the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FIPL) fund, the Farming Investment Fund or the Platinum Jubilee Village Hall Fund.
- 1.7 As with the UKSPF, spending from the REPF has to be aligned to 'interventions' with associated outputs and outcomes as set out in the relevant document published on the gov.uk website - see https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1101590/Rural_England_Prosperty_Fund_interventions_objectives_outputs_and_outcomes_list.pdf

2. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

- 2.1 The REPF prospectus sets out a requirement to consult rural stakeholders on how the funding should be used. Officers have spoken to a range of relevant partners, including the Cotswolds National Landscape, Gloucestershire Rural Community Council, the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) and Farm491. The matter was also discussed at the Cotswold Economic Advisory Group, which counts the Royal Agricultural University amongst its membership.
- 2.2 In addition, officers have worked with colleagues at Forest of Dean Council to arrange a half day workshop on this subject on 21st October at Hartpury College/University, which was opened up to all four District Councils in Gloucestershire who have received an indicative allocation under this fund.
- 2.3 A 'Call for Projects' has been issued via a special Business Matters newsletter, to Town and Parish Councils and other stakeholders and also put on the Business Support page of the Council's website. This asks interested parties to submit details of potential projects which can then help shape our submission to Government. It is not a formal application process and does not commit the Council to funding any projects - it is merely an exercise for the Council to understand what potential projects may come forward in a future application process. The closing date for the 'Call for Projects' is 5pm on Friday 21st October.

3. NEEDS OF THE AREA

- 3.1 Our submission must also be based on the needs of the area. Officers have undertaken an analysis of a wide range of data and the District scores well on most indicators. However, the District performs relatively poorly in terms of 'Barriers to Housing and Services'. It is in



the top 20% of rural authorities for travel time to key services.

The District also performs relatively poorly in the subsets of access to services and access to green space.

3.2 The District has the lowest median income in the County and the highest property prices, making housing difficult to afford for many - hence creating good quality, well-paid jobs in the District is a priority for the Council.

3.3 The District has a higher proportion of over 65s than the County and national average and it is growing at a faster rate than those comparators. The District saw the second highest population growth of any district in Gloucestershire between 2011-21 and is forecast to remain in this position for the period to 2043. Therefore ensuring that there is sufficient community infrastructure to service a growing population is important.

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1 The Council has been indicatively awarded £764,292 from the Rural England Prosperity Fund and must submit a report to the Government setting out how it is proposed to be used. A 'Call for Projects' is being undertaken and the results of this will be reported to Cabinet either at or before the meeting.

4.2 The recommendations of Officers is that a grant scheme should be run to enable all eligible projects to be assessed against the Fund's criteria. It is anticipated that an Assessment Panel made up of internal and external members will judge applications from both businesses and community groups, in a similar way to that used to allocate funds from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

4.3 It is further recommended that The Old Station project in Cirencester is supported with funding from the REPF. This will assist this heritage building to be brought back into use for community purposes in line with the Fund's objective around local arts, culture, heritage and creative activities.

4.4 The Call for Projects, at the time of writing, has generated significant interest from both businesses and community groups and this will guide the interventions included within the submission to the Government. In order to meet the Council's objectives around growing a vibrant economy with high quality jobs, it is recommended that the intervention relating to small scale investment in micro and small enterprises is included. Given the issues the District faces around access to services and its commitment to tackling climate change, it is recommended that the intervention around active travel is included.



- 4.5** It is also recommended that the interventions around climate change measures and broadband at village halls and other community buildings are included, along with improvements to local rural green spaces and 'impactful volunteering' and social action projects. The success of Crowdfund Cotswold could be leveraged to maximise the added investment brought in as a result of the REPF funding.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1** There are no direct financial implications at this stage. Projects agreed will be included in the capital programme and be funded from the REPF. Any allocation unspent will be returned to the Government at the end of each financial year.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1** There are no legal implications arising directly from this Report.

7. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 7.1** Each project will be assessed in terms of risks and managed using the Project Management Framework.

8. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 8.1** Each project supported by the REPF will be assessed for its equalities impact.

9. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1** The REPF prospectus states that Councils should consider how any investments from the Fund contribute to nature recovery and Net Zero objectives, including reaching Net Zero by 2050, resilience to natural hazards and the 25 Year Environment Plan.

10. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 10.1** The Council could choose not to submit the addendum to the Local Investment Plan to the Government, but this would mean it would be unlikely to be able to draw down the indicative funding made available. It could also choose to put forward other priorities without undertaking engagement with stakeholders, but this would not be in accordance with the prospectus and may result in our Local Investment Plan not being approved. Neither option is recommended.

II. BACKGROUND PAPERS

II.1 The following documents have been identified by the author of the report in accordance with section 100D.5(a) of the Local Government Act 1972 and are listed in accordance with section 100 D.1(a) for inspection by members of the public:

- List or add none. (examples may include risk assessment and consultation records)

These documents will be available for inspection online at www.cotswold.gov.uk or by contacting democratic services democratic@cotswold.gov.uk for a period of up to 4 years from the date of the meeting.

(END)