**NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM'S REPORT TO CABINET**

**14 October 2025**

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| **Report Title:** | **UK Shared Prosperity Update** |
| **Submitted by:** | **Deputy Chief Executive** |
| **Portfolios:** | **One Council, People and Partnerships** |
| **Ward(s) affected:** | **All** |

**Purpose of the Report**

To outline progress in delivering the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and to advise of the projects going forward to deliver the interventions as part of the plan.

**Recommendation**

That Cabinet:

1. **Acknowledges the content in this report and continues to work with the SPF Board to deliver the programme.**
2. **Authorises the Deputy Chief Executive in consultation with the One Council, People and Partnerships Portfolio holder to confirm any further projects within the funding.**
3. **Receive further updates on the delivery of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and any subsequent funding programme beyond March 2026.**

**Reasons**

It is appropriate that the Cabinet endorses the work of the UKSPF Board noting the investment in the geographical area for employment and skills, supporting businesses and providing projects within the local community. The Fund has previously been reported to Cabinet and Cabinet noted that further update reports would be made.

1. **Background**

1.1 The Government launched the UK Shared Prosperity Fund in April 2022 inviting Council's to submit Investment Plans to meet three investment priorities:

- Community and place
- Supporting Local Business; and
- People and Skills

1.2 As the lead accountable body, the Council has supported the development of the Newcastle Shared Prosperity Board, which acts as a consultation group to ensure that the local area benefits from the funding opportunity. When the first SPF funding was announced there was an external call for project proposals and assessing them fairly and transparently on a competitive basis. In 2025, the Government agreed an interim extension of funding, given the constraints of a twelve-month delivery window, it was considered impractical to replicate the extensive process used during the initial three-year programme which requires a required significant time and resources. A more streamlined approach was therefore necessary to reduce the risk of underspend and to note that the funding was assumed based on 60% of the previous year's allocation.

1.3 The projects now moving forward are delivering tangible outcomes and fostering stronger collaboration. Over the first three years, the project forum—comprising 32 project leads—has demonstrated excellent partnership working and a shared knowledge base. This collaborative foundation is a key reason for continuing these relationships into the interim year within the Government guidance.

## 2. <u>Issues</u>

2.1 The following highlights the overall SPF interventions required under the three investment themes and the high-level progress made.

2.2 **Supporting Local Business investment priority** has been positive.

- **Non-financial support**, a total of 445 enterprises have received this kind of support, including through the Moving Ahead project. This project helps business grow through innovation support, R&D relationships, and a strong local network;

- **The number of entrepreneurs assisted to be enterprise ready**, 189 entrepreneurs have been assisted, including through the Business Enterprise Support / Coaching project which delivers local, individual, needs based support to increase the number of start-ups and combat low levels of entrepreneurship in the area;

- **The number of people reached**, with 993 people directly receiving Local Businesses support.

2.3 **Communities and Place investment priority**, highlighted during stakeholder consultations include.

- **Engagement and reach**: Nearly 85,000 people have been directly impacted by the projects funded through Communities and Place interventions, primarily through the installation of information boards and social media campaigns that have promoted and supported local music.

- **Community Support**: The Community Connector programme engaged residents by supporting individuals facing social isolation, mental health challenges, or difficulties accessing services. The rate of sustained employment rose from 72% to 86%, post connector support.

- **Green Space Improvements**: Approximately 700m² of green space was improved, with a focus on enhancing Clough Hall Park. These improvements included upgrading sports facilities, creating play areas, and introducing planting schemes to encourage use by different age groups. Additionally, 26,900 trees were planted, primarily through the nature recovery in urban spaces project. Although, as noted above in chapter 2, local resident buy-in and planning permissions made these improvements more challenging than initially expected.

- **Support for Vulnerable Locals**: Over £1 million was invested in a new homeless hub that provides essential services and support to individuals facing homelessness. The hub offers beds, showers, and laundry facilities, along with access to support services, advice, and referrals for medical appointments.

- **Volunteering Opportunities**: Nearly 100% of the target has been achieved, with 64 volunteering opportunities created or safeguarded against a target of 65. This includes initiatives such as the Volunteers for All programme, which promotes community engagement and volunteerism, and the Community Connector programme, which links residents with local resources and support services.

- **Community Amenities and Facilities**: A total of 14 community amenities and facilities were supported, created, or improved, achieving 117% of the target. This was primarily driven by the SML Community Hubs initiative, which enhanced the role of community-managed libraries (CMLs) by transforming them into multifunctional spaces.

## 2.4 People and Skills investment priority

- Number of economically inactive people engaging with keyworker support services (273)
- People receiving support to gain employment (332); and
- Volunteering opportunities supported (60).

## 3.0 UKSPF Phase 2 delivery

### 3.1 Programme Overview

As outlined above the SPF Board has followed the Government guidance with the continuation of the majority of successful projects at a lower funding level. Alongside these there are new initiatives aligned with evolving priorities. As of April 2025, there were 25 projects delivering, including six new ones focused on Creative Industries and Digital Innovation.

### 3.2 Employment and Skills Forum

We have also strengthened our employment and skills offer by enhancing the only dedicated forum in the county directly linked to the Countywide Steering Group. This platform continues to foster collaboration and training across a wide range of local organisations.

### 3.3 Innovation and Sustainability

In July 2025, CyberKiln was commissioned to develop a pilot carbon calculator designed to measure emissions from household and business technologies, including mobile phones and televisions. This initiative aims to improve carbon literacy and support businesses in reducing their environmental impact.

### 3.4 Creative Sector Development

The Honey Box support the local music scene with plans to align the reduced SPF funding and the successful Arts Council bid for *Amplifying Grassroots Talent*. The success of the Honeybox Hive project, funded through UKSPF, was instrumental in securing Arts Council support—an achievement that builds on the strong foundation laid over the past year.

We plan to deliver external (out-of-town) initiatives using Arts Council funding, alongside local UKSPF-funded projects, coordinating efforts to maximise impact. A highlight will be a Music Awards Show in partnership with the New Vic Theatre, celebrating local musical talent and fostering positive public engagement.

### 3.5 Skills and Knowledge Transfer

Through partnerships with Keele University (*Moving Ahead and Flourish*) and Staffordshire University (*ADITA*), at least 11 projects have benefited from student placements this quarter. Each placement offers a 75 hour bursary supported role, providing businesses with a “critical friend” to support innovation and knowledge exchange. A notable example includes a student working with Global Air Projects Ltd to develop a real-time portal for engineers and customers to manage offsite data and reports.

The BRILLIANT Bamboo project continues to progress with its Engage and Grow Space initiative in Newcastle-under-Lyme. The pilot BAM-BOOST grow-space aims to engage communities through action research, activate underused land to foster environmental and social connections, create new green spaces for growing and community activities and build foundations for future funding and income generation.

### 3.6 Community Engagement

The Support Staffordshire Volunteer 4All project has made a strong delivery supporting events with over 400 attendees. The Volunteer Officer has engaged with 135 individuals and 81 organisations, successfully placing 15 volunteers into roles across the borough.

### 3.7 Business Support

The Staffordshire Growth Hub has appointed a dedicated Business Advisor for the borough providing up to 3 hours of one-to-one support to help businesses overcome growth barriers. The Advisor has already supported two businesses and brings strong knowledge of local and national programmes. The Growth Hub has awarded its marketing contract to Shepherd PR and continues to operate a well-used business helpline, website, and social media presence. A series of employer-led workshops is underway, including a successful ‘Sales Psychology’ session held at the New Vic Theatre in May. There will be a ‘Meet the Buyer’ event focused on Construction and Housing at Keele Science Park in September, connecting local businesses with contractors and procurement opportunities.

### 3.8 Networking and Collaboration

The Connects programme has continued to deliver monthly meetings reaching over 60 business representatives during this period and is planning for larger networking events at Keele later in the year in line with the Newcastle Business Festival.

## 4. <u>**Reasons for Proposed Solution**</u>

4.1 For residents and businesses in the Borough to continue to benefit from the UKSPF funding the Council is required to continue as the accountable body and work with the SPF Board. This report outlines progress in the key areas and recommends continued delivery in line with the approved priorities and projects.

## 5. **Options Considered**

5.1 The Council could decide not to participate in the SPF programme but this is not considered a suitable option as there would be no benefits to the Newcastle area.

## 6. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

6.1 The guidance states district councils are the lead investment authorities. The Government have outlined that this is to be a genuinely devolved fund with plenty of local discretion, where the investment proposal is about “unlocking the allocation”. As lead authority the Council is required to complete monitoring returns and financial statements.

## 7. **Equality Impact Assessment**

7.1 The Fund seeks to invest in community, business and people. As part of the development of the Investment Plan consideration of equality impacts will be required, but essentially investment will seek to improve any inequalities within our communities.

## 8. **Financial and Resource Implications**

8.1 Newcastle’s allocation for 2025/26 is £1,582,136 this includes the capital allocation of £292,112 and revenue allocation of £1,290,024.

## 9. **Major Risks**

9.1 The Shared Prosperity Fund is a significant opportunity to support our local community without the effective commissioning of services in line with the Investment Plan and Government priorities there is a risk of the locality missing this funding opportunity.

## 10. **UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG)**

10.1 The fund seeks to support the delivery of projects to support economic growth and sustainable development.


## 11. One Council

Please confirm that consideration has been given to the following programmes of work:

**One Commercial Council x**
*We will make investment to diversify our income and think entrepreneurially.*

**One Digital Council x**
*We will develop and implement a digital approach which makes it easy for all residents and businesses to engage with the Council, with our customers at the heart of every interaction.*

**One Sustainable Council x**
*We will deliver on our commitments to a net zero future and make all decisions with sustainability as a driving principle*

11.1 The UKSPF funding allocated for Newcastle will deliver against all three objectives, as set out in this report.

## 12. Key Decision Information

12.1 This is a key decision item as the funding to be commissioned is over £100,000.

## 13. Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions

13.1 On 19th July 2022, Cabinet resolved that:

- The establishment of a UK Shared Prosperity Board (“the Board”) with the membership as set out in paragraph 2.6 of the report be ratified;

- The Executive Director Commercial Development and Economic Growth [Deputy Chief Executive] in conjunction with the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder - One Council, People and Partnerships be authorised to:-

- vary the terms of reference and membership of the Board from time to time as necessary to meet the needs and objectives of the Board develop and submit an investment plan to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)
- accept any UKSPF allocated to the Council on behalf of the Council, develop and commence the commissioning of projects to be funded by UKSPF and commence commissioning on Council led projects in preparation for the delivery of the Investment Plan.

- A report will be taken to a future meeting of Cabinet to update on the delivery of UKSPF

## 14. List of Appendices

14.1 None

## 15. Background Papers

15.1 Information on the fund is available at:- https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ukhttps://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-prospectusshared-prosperity-fund-prospectus

15.2 A copy of the Investment Plan and interventions are available on request from the Regeneration Team.