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## Business Support Year 3 Evaluation

Project Lead:	Tom Winters
Intervention:	E23: Strengthening local entrepreneurial ecosystems and supporting businesses at all stages of their development to start, sustain, grow and innovate, including through local networks.
Original Total Budget:	£190,804
Revised Total Budget:	£186,804
Original Year 3 Budget:	£112,388
Revised Year 3 Budget:	£108,388
Revised Year 3 Spend:	£88,748

Output	Target (across 3 years)	Achieved
Number of businesses receiving non-financial support	164	119
Number of potential entrepreneurs provided assistance to be business ready	39	39
Number of people attending training sessions	0	32
Outcome	Target (across 3 years)	Achieved
Number of enterprises with improved productivity	30	28
Number of enterprises adopting new or improved products or services	6	7
Number of new enterprises created as a result of support	15	8
Jobs created as a result of support	6	11
Number of enterprises adopting new to the firm technologies or processes	33	31

### Background

East Devon's UKSPF Investment Plan committed to the continuation of free, generalist business support services previously supported by European Regional Development Funding (ERDF). The majority of funding from the Business Support Programme was allocated to 'Prosper', the ERDF successor scheme managed by Devon County Council and jointly supported by Exeter, Mid Devon, and East Devon. Prosper was procured and commenced delivery in Year 2, with the same support offer continuing throughout Year 3. The Business Information Point and Cosmic Consortium were successful in winning the tender and served as the delivery partner for Prosper.

£20,000 of the Business Support Programme, split across Years 2 and 3, was ringfenced for an agri-events series. This consisted of four interactive workshops,

predominantly held on-farm, designed to support farm businesses to diversify and adopt new technologies. Both strands of the programme commenced in Year 2, with Year 3 delivery focused on continuation of ongoing support.

## **Activities**

Referrals into Prosper remained strong throughout Year 3. All businesses received support through one of the four procured lots: generalist, green, start-up, and job creation. As each lot had a designated budget based on cost per output/outcome and the number of outputs/outcomes forecast, managing demand across the lots was necessary to ensure full spend. Businesses were assigned a lot based on the support needs described during the referral process.

As early indications showed far greater demand for generalist and start-up support, an underspend risk was identified for the remaining two lots and action was taken to reallocate funding from the less popular lots. However, while the terms of the procurement did permit some adjustment of the budget between lots, the flexibility to reassign funding was limited, so even after this change was made there was still a high risk of underspend.

During Year 3, EDDC launched the Carbon Action Programme (CAP), which provided support to prospective applicants to the Council's Carbon Action Fund (CAF) decarbonisation grant scheme. There was some overlap in the support offered between the CAP and the green support lot for Prosper, but CAP had a far higher budget for decarbonisation plans. As these were required for all CAF applicants, the grant offered a clear incentive for organisations to sign up to the CAP which was missing from the green support lot.

There is no evidence to suggest that the launch of the CAP reduced take-up levels for green support under Prosper. Both programmes struggled to attract interest in 1-2-1 support, workshops, and training, with most interest in CAP driven by those interested in grant funding.

When more specific types of support such as decarbonisation and job creation are offered alongside general support, it is unsurprising that the latter was consistently more popular. Delivery providers found that businesses selecting the 'generalist' option often wanted advice on reducing their carbon footprint or supporting taking on employees, but as this was one element of a broader set of needs, they chose a more flexible and open support offer. This demonstrates a fundamental issue with how the support offer was structured; it required businesses to be cognisant of their needs prior to engaging with Prosper.

The mismatch in demand across lots created a paradox whereby the budget for generalist and start-up support ran out despite significant funding amounts remaining in the overall budget. East Devon businesses seeking generalist and start-up support after January were unable to receive support via Prosper, necessitating the

procurement of a top-up support service (named 'GetSet East Devon and delivered by YTKO) to avoid a long gap in provision. Running two business support programmes concurrently, with two procurement processes and delivery providers, was not an efficient use of officer time, created confusion amongst businesses navigating the offer, and needed additional internal funding.

Although funding committed in the procured contract was unable to be reassigned prior to the end of March, the forecast underspend was split across delivery and staffing and marketing costs incurred by DCC. With a reduced support offer available, marketing activity was wound up, leaving £4,000 of underspend which could be returned early to EDDC. This £4,000 contributed towards the £9,950 contract for GetSet, ensuring the funding was spent on business support whilst reducing the underspend returned to MHCLG.

Achievement of full spend for GetSet demonstrated that demand in East Devon for generalist and start-up support was likely sufficient to utilise the full delivery budget assigned to Prosper had there been flexibility to reallocate this between lots. The negative impact of this rigidity was widespread, requiring additional officer resource to procure and manage a new service, fragmenting provision, and needing an internal funding commitment from EDDC.

Support was delivered through a combination of 1-2-1 support and workshops, with all referrals offered the opportunity to meet individually with an advisor. The aim to create a business-led programme, with an initial diagnostic held to understand a business' specific needs, around which the support could be tailored. Ongoing support could then either be delivered on a 1-2-1 basis or clients could be sign-posted to workshops or outside resources.

Events were delivered by both the Programme Team at DCC and Business Information Point, with a variety of venues, topics, and formats trialled. Initial engagement with workshops was lower than anticipated, with promising sign-up numbers failing to convert to a high number of attendees. This led to BiP pausing their workshop series over the summer and eventually cutting the number of events held, as 1-2-1 support was far more popular and was most effective at achieving outputs.

The Programme Team continued to hold events, with the location rotating between Exeter, East Devon, and Mid Devon, although businesses from all participating districts could attend any of the events. For Year 3, the East Devon event focused on online marketing and promotion, including improving Search Engine Optimisation and using LinkedIn. More time was given to networking than learning, an adjustment made following feedback from previous event attendees. The event was fully booked and well attended, showing improved engagement compared to earlier workshops.

Variable attendance at workshops suggests that attendance level is driven by the topic and format of events, rather than general disinterest in workshops as a method

of support. The higher attendance levels at the second East Devon event than the first, and the fact that 40% of East Devon businesses engaging with Prosper attended an event, shows that there is an audience for workshops if shaped by specific and current demand.

## **Agri Events**

Delivery of the agri-event series primarily occurred in Year 3, with three out of the four on-farm events taking place in 2024/25. The support was directly delivered by DCC, with attendees signposted to their wider farm support offers, including Future Farm Resilience (FFR) and the Devon Agri-Tech Alliance (DATA). Topics covered included farm diversification, carbon reduction, and the future of farming.

As with Prosper events, fewer attendees showed than signed up, with overall attendance of 58 falling just shy of the target of 60. Changing weather conditions and emergencies mean farms have more fluctuation in schedules than other businesses, which makes last minute no-shows harder to avoid. To mitigate against this, more businesses were permitted to book on than spaces available.

All attendees were given resource packs tailored to each event. These included information on the speakers and topics covered, but also signposting to other support offers, upcoming events, and grants available in the local area. This enabled farmers to access follow-on support after the event and become more aware of wider activity.

Event attendance was not strictly limited to East Devon farmers, with farmers from other districts and representatives from other businesses, such as agricultural and ecological consultancies, signing up. This was reciprocal, with East Devon businesses also able to attend agri-events held in other districts as part of the programme. As number of attendees had limited impact on the event costs, it was practical to be flexible and open up more events to East Devon farmers.

The underspend from the Business Support Programme represented 88% of funding returned to MHCLG at the end of 2024/25. This was split across both Prosper and Agri-Events, although the most significant sum was underspend from the Prosper delivery budget. As delivery continued throughout March, plus the aforementioned restrictions of the procurement contract, the majority of underspend forecast could not be confirmed or redistributed prior to the end of March deadline. In the end, £19,640 was returned to MHCLG.

## **Outputs, Outcomes, and Impacts**

Output and outcome achievement varied across lots, resulting in some targets being exceeded and others missed. As the supplier was paid for each output or outcome achieved, spend against each lot was directly correlated with outputs and outcomes. Therefore, the target number of entrepreneurs supported was exactly met because

the full budget was spent, whereas the overall number of businesses supported was lower than expected due to the underspend.

Another reason why the number of businesses supported did not meet the target number was due to a change in how those attending the agri-events were counted. When the initial target was set, it included the 60 forecast agri-event attendees. However, as the number of attendees was measured in individuals rather than businesses and individuals could attend more than one event, the number of businesses was far lower than the attendee numbers.

Therefore, only 23 farm businesses counted toward the total number of businesses supported, with the indicator 'number of people attending training sessions' introduced to record the individuals participating. Whilst Prosper did slightly underachieve on the number of businesses supported, 96 against a target of 104, the majority of the discrepancy is accounted for by the agri-events attendee numbers.

The payment structure for Prosper delivery enabled the supplier to claim for outcomes as well as outputs, with these paid at a higher rate. This was intended to represent the more intensive support required to produce outcomes and the additional hours of support given. However, as the time spent with each client was determined by their need level, it is unclear if there is a strong link between the cost of support and the hours spent with each business.

The supplier could only claim one outcome per business supported, regardless of how many were reported and recorded, limiting the amount which could be claimed per client. The exception to this was the 'jobs created' outcome, where claims were based on the number of jobs created, rather than the number of businesses creating jobs. Although the expectation was that a single business was unlikely to create numerous jobs within the time period, one business supported reported the creation of ten new jobs after receiving support. This massively inflated the claimable amount for that business, creating a huge variance in the amount different businesses cost to support.

This highlights the issue with an output and outcome-based payment model. Although it incentivises output achievement and encourages the supplier to follow-up with beneficiaries to find out the impacts of support, it is not necessarily representative of the amount of support given. Furthermore, outcomes are considered to have been achieved when reported by the business in the months following support. However, it is not possible to verify whether or not these outcomes would have been achieved, without Prosper support. Therefore, despite the higher payments offered for outcome achievement, it is harder to link support provided to outputs realised, casting doubt on whether additionality had been achieved.

The GetSet scheme procured and delivered by EDDC in the final quarter of 2024/25 paid per hour of support given, providing a useful comparison point. When

comparing the number of beneficiaries in relation to the total contract value, excluding marketing and overheads, the average cost per business supported was £1,124 for Prosper against £710 for GetSet. Both schemes offered between 3 and 12 hours of support to eligible businesses.

Although the cost per beneficiary was higher for Prosper, it was a more comprehensive provision which included specialist support not available under the GetSet. For example, the cost per business receiving non-financial support under the generalist lot was lower than the green lot, with specialist expertise priced higher. There were also additional services, such as access to a Learning Platform and the opportunity to attend events, which were available to businesses supported under Prosper but not GetSet.

The same set of outputs and outcomes were reported against for both GetSet and Prosper, although evidence only needed to be submitted for output achievement under Prosper. GetSet reported outcomes against the majority of businesses supported, questioning the need to pay for outcomes to incentivise their achievement. However, as these were not robustly evidenced or independently verified, this may not be an accurate comparison.

Despite the differences between the two schemes, the scale of difference in cost per beneficiary raises questions about the value for money of the Prosper scheme. This is likely due to the output and outcome payment model, where the high cost per job created, and the ability to claim for more than one job created per business skewed the data. If businesses supported under the job creation lot are excluded, the cost per business supported reduces to £751, a comparative figure to GetSet. This suggests that altering the way the 'jobs created' outcome is claimed could significantly improve the cost effectiveness of the scheme.

Cost per beneficiary under the agri-events scheme can be considered as cost per attendee or cost per discrete business or individual supported, which ranges from £296 to £748 per beneficiary. The large overlap in the businesses attending each event meant that the number of businesses supported was less than half the total attendee numbers, vastly increasing the cost per business supported.

In the absence of any recorded outcomes for the agri-events programme, value for money can only be assessed against the cost per business supported. With the cost equitable to Prosper, despite the reduced intensity and hours of support given, the project cannot be said to demonstrate good or bad value for money.

Feedback gathered by Business Information Point was overwhelmingly positive about the support given, with 100% of respondents reporting that they either would recommend or had recommended the programme to others. All beneficiaries either strongly agreed or agreed that the advisor communicated clearly and understood their business needs and challenges. Comments provided expressed the value the business advisors gave as a source of emotional support, with beneficiaries

reporting that they felt reassured, more confident, and that the advisor genuinely cared about their business.

A survey conducted by EDDC sought to determine the impacts on the business rather than the business owners following support, however, with only 11 responses, the conclusions drawn may not be universally applicable. The responses received indicate that beneficiaries found the support useful in improving business practices, adopting digital technologies, including updating their web presence and social media marketing and boosting confidence, but that it was less effective at driving business growth. Of the examples of support given, the most commonly cited were improving marketing strategies and managing an online presence. Whilst almost all respondents said there had been positive changes to their business following support, the impacts seem to be largely focused on the fundamentals of business development, rather than leading to rapid business growth.

### Evaluation Summary

Key Question	Response
1. Was the project effective?	Prosper was effective at providing generalist and start-up support that was targeted at beneficiaries' individual needs, with a good number of outcomes relating to productivity and job creation resulting from support. It is hard to determine the efficacy of the agri-events as no outcomes or impacts were recorded.
2. Was the process of implementation efficient?	As both schemes were operating in Year 2, no new activities were implemented in Year 3.
3. Did the project provide good value for money?	For Prosper, there was a higher cost per business supported than similar schemes, although this was largely due to the supplier claiming a far higher amount per job created than any other outcome. Using the same method for the agri-events project shows a relatively worse value for money, but the more specialised nature of support makes it hard to compare the cost per output.
4. Did the project provide additionality?	There was no other provision freely available to East Devon businesses that offered tailored, 1-2-1 support or to help potential entrepreneurs start new businesses. The agri-events series also presented a unique offer, although it aligned with other DCC-led programmes such as Future Farm Support.
5. Did the project align with the strategic ambitions set out in the UKSPF Investment Plan?	Both elements strongly correlated to the project proposals laid out in the Investment Plan. The increased productivity reported by businesses suggests that Prosper supported the aim of reducing the productivity gap, although without the salaries of the jobs created, it is not possible to assess whether any progress was made to closing the wage gap. The lack of interest in the green business support offered also reduced the impact of the programme on enabling businesses to decarbonise.

## Lessons Learnt

- Where outcomes vary according to cost, this should be clearly linked to either a higher number of average support hours or an alternative, more intensive support provision to ensure good value for money.
- Specialist support provisions should have a flexible, rather than fixed budget, to enable funding to be reallocated if demand is lower than anticipated.
- Projects focusing on event delivery should incorporate a follow-up support element to measure impact beyond the scope of the event.
- Instead of aiming for a set number, workshops and training offers should be demand-led and coordinated around evidence gathered from 1-2-1 support.
- Survey work should be co-designed with third party suppliers and EDDC to prevent duplication, increase the likelihood of responses, and ensure the information gathered meets shared needs.

## Carbon Action Fund Year 3 Evaluation

<b>Project Lead</b>	Tom Winters
<b>Intervention</b>	E17 - Funding for the development and promotion of the visitor economy E29 - Supporting decarbonisation and improving the natural environment whilst growing the local economy 1.1 Funding (capital grants) for small scale investment in micro and small enterprises in rural areas. E11 Funding (capital grants) for investment in capacity building and infrastructure support for local civil society and community groups
<b>Total Allocation</b>	£0
<b>Year 3 Allocation</b>	£512,948
<b>Year 3 Spend</b>	£540,539

<b>Output</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Achieved</b>
Number of enterprises receiving grants	N/A	12
Number of organisations receiving grants	N/A	16
Number of low or zero carbon energy infrastructures installed (Number of units)	N/A	22
Number of farm businesses supported	N/A	3
<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Achieved</b>
Estimated Carbon dioxide equivalent reductions as a result of support (Tonnes of Co2e)	N/A	85

### Background

The Carbon Action Fund (CAF) was a decarbonisation grant scheme open to both businesses and community organisations. It did not feature in the original UKSPF Investment Plan but was developed midway through delivery as both a response to the latent demand for capital grants for decarbonisation equipment and the lessons learnt from its predecessor, the Culture, Leisure, and Tourism Fund (CLTF).

Budgets from the Sustainable Tourism Programme (STP), the Net Zero Innovation Fund (NZIF), and the CLTF were redeployed to provide the CAF grant pot. For the STP and CLTF budgets, this was not a significant departure from their intended use. In Year 2, the NZIF was used to part-fund the Innovation and Resilience Fund, with the budget ringfenced for businesses aiming to develop low carbon products and technologies. The lack of eligible project submissions required an alternative use of

the budget in Year 3, with the CAF aligning with the ultimate aim of the fund to support carbon reduction and bringing greater parity between the budgets available to businesses and community organisations.

There were three main differences between the CAF and the CLTF. Firstly, the Carbon Action Fund was open to all businesses and community organisations, removing the restrictions on the sectors who could apply. Although there was a dedicated pot for tourism businesses, this was only 25% of the total funding available for businesses.

Secondly, the accessibility strand of the grant scheme was removed as there was limited interest from businesses under CLTF. There were only two grants awarded for accessibility projects, one of which did not go forward, with the grant being returned. When included alongside decarbonisation grants, which have a clearer financial benefit, funding for accessibility projects was a less attractive offer.

Lastly, a core eligibility criterion of the CAF was submission of a carbon footprint report and carbon action plan, a key learning from the evaluation of CLTF. An internally funded Carbon Action Programme (CAP) was run alongside the CAF to provide these free of charge and give pre-application support to prospective applicants. The CAP budget was sufficient to provide carbon action plans to up to fifty organisations, enabling applicants to apply for the most beneficial equipment based on their energy usages and patterns, as well as giving more accurate forecast reductions in their applications.

## **Grant Scheme**

The proposal for the Carbon Action Fund was approved by the UKSPF Panel in February, enabling the design work to commence before the start of Year 3. Whilst the reuse of CLTF documentation cut down the requirements in developing the new project, the policy required some amendments to reflect the lessons learnt from the CLTF. Key changes included the removal of funding 'pathways', increasing the maximum grant funding amounts available, and reducing the match funding commitments for businesses. These were similar to the changes made to the IRF, where application numbers increased significantly when higher amounts were available and the minimum match was lowered.

The 10% match funding requirement for community organisations was maintained, but the minimum requirement for businesses was reduced from 50% to 30%, as this was seen as a core reason why the Tourism pathway of CLTF produced an underspend. Community organisations offered an average of 17% match funding and businesses 36%, showing the intervention level was set correctly and a higher amount would've likely served as a deterrent to prospective applicants.

With a larger total sum available, the maximum grant request was increased to £50,000, however applicants able to evidence significant carbon savings were permitted to apply for up to £100,000 if they first sought prior approval from EDDC. This was done to both reduce the likelihood of an underspend by supporting a

smaller number of larger projects and to allow applications from more ambitious projects.

42% of the bids submitted exceeded the CLTF maximum of £20,000, with an average request of £23,300, demonstrating a clear demand for higher amounts of grant funding than available previously. However, as only three applications out of forty-four applied for £50,000 and one for over £50,000 were submitted, a lower maximum amount could be set without significant impacts on the number of applications received. The largest bid received, for £100k, was rejected by Panel Members, who were unconvinced that the benefits delivered warranted such a significant investment of public funding. If special exemptions to maximum amounts are permitted in future schemes, a clearer definition of 'significant' reductions and the benefits expected would help set expectations for both applicants and Panel Members.

The Carbon Action Fund submission window was kept open from August to November 2024, with three monthly panel meetings held in October, November, and December to determine the applications submitted in that time period. Due to the size of the fund and the volume of anticipated applications, a staggered approach helped to manage the time required of officers and Panel Members to administer the scheme, whilst providing applicants with additional time to compile their bids.

One challenge experienced was the lag between prospective applicants signing up for CAP support and receiving the carbon action plans they needed to apply. Although the CAP went live three months prior to the CAF, the CAP delivery partners struggled to engage organisations, with those referred not responding to requests for information. Widely publicising details on the CAF launch date did little to solve this issue, with engagement only increasing substantially once the fund was opened. This meant few organisations were ready to apply when CAF opened and there was significant time pressure to ensure CAP support was delivered before the final deadlines.

The majority of eligible applications received came from CAP beneficiaries, with only three submitting privately funded carbon action plans. This gave officers a good understanding of the number of applications expected for each round based on how many organisations had finalised their carbon action plans that month and reassurance on bids coming through for subsequent rounds. However, the effectiveness of running the support scheme to improve the accuracy of forecast carbon reduction cannot be determined at this stage, as projects are yet to provide their revised carbon footprints, which are due one year post project completion.

44 applications were received in total; 21 from Community Organisations and 23 from Businesses, 5 of which were Tourism Businesses. The total request was just over £1m, almost double the total amount of funding available, suggesting that the scheme design was appealing and accessible without receiving an overwhelming number of applications. The pre-selection process created by the CAP proved effective in avoiding a high number of ineligible applications, with only four unable to proceed to scoring.

All eligible applications were scored by two officers, with comments and an overall recommendation provided to the UKSPF Panel for final determination. A more objective approach to scoring was taken than in other grant schemes, with a formula used to determine the score assigned to both the amount of carbon saved and the value for money provided. This formula sorted projects into deciles, with the greatest reduction or lowest cost per tonne of carbon receiving a 10 and the inverse getting a 1. This meant projects were assessed in relation to each other, avoiding different interpretations of what a 'good' carbon reduction or value for money would be.

28 projects were approved by the UKSPF Panel with a total of £585,030 given out in grant funding. In addition to UKSPF and REPF monies, EDDC was successful in securing £36,260 of external match funding. This came from Local Growth Fund money which remained unspent following the dissolution of the Heart of the South West Local Economic Partnership. A small commitment from EDDC's internal business support budget was also used in the final round to make up a small shortfall in the pot against an approved project.

All funding ringfenced for tourism businesses was spent, with three accommodation providers awarded grants. The only other notable sector supported was agriculture, with three farm businesses supported, although this was likely due to their high energy usage presenting opportunities for larger carbon reduction rather than specific targeting. Although there was no focus on culture and leisure venues in CAF, leisure facilities benefitted heavily from the funding available, with seven sports clubs supported. With only one cultural venue supported, it is likely that this was coincidental and not a legacy from the CLTF. Future schemes could be more explicit in targeting more carbon intensive sectors, including through prioritisation of these organisations when registering for the Carbon Action Programme.

All projects had to be completed by the end of the financial year, meaning projects approved in December had less than four months to deliver. Despite the tight timeframe, most projects were straightforward and quick to deliver, with a single piece of equipment to be installed. All but one project managed to finish successfully in time and submit confirmation of spend with photos of the installation by the end of March. This demonstrates that the spend deadlines were reasonable and sufficient time was given for the type of projects supported.

Midway through the CAF application window, Devon County Council announced their Green Impact Fund (GIF), a decarbonisation grants scheme which bore many similarities to CAF. Open to organisations across Devon, it offered grants of £5,000 to £49,999, with a 20% match requirement for businesses and no match requirement for community organisations. As with the CAF, all projects needed to be complete by the 31<sup>st</sup> of March, although all GIF funding was paid in arrears, potentially reducing the attractiveness of the offer despite the lower match requirements.

With overlapping application windows, there was a significant risk that potential CAF applicants would either choose to apply to the GIF instead or submit duplicative applications. To avoid double funding, EDDC and DCC shared names of applicants and identified those who had applied to both, ensuring their applications were for different projects. Only one organisation received funding from both the GIF and

CAF, with different equipment purchased with each grant. Unsuccessful CAF applicants were signposted towards the GIF, with two securing funding.

A full year of data is required to show the impact of the decarbonisation equipment on each organisation's carbon emissions due to seasonal fluctuations in energy usage and generation. This means monitoring on the Carbon Action Fund and the overall success of the fund cannot be fully evaluated until Spring 2026 when all final reports have been received.

### **Outputs, Outcomes, and Impacts**

Reporting the outputs and outcomes for the Carbon Action Fund presented a challenge, as the targets submitted to MHCLG were against the original interventions (CLTF, Sustainable Tourism Programme, and Net Zero Innovation Fund) and no updated forecasts were created for the CAF. All outputs achieved had to be disaggregated and matched with the appropriate intervention, with different interventions selecting different indicators depending on the scope of original use of the funding. The split between UKSPF and REPF added further complexity as some indicators are unique to one funding stream, so the total outputs and outcomes reported did not match the actual numbers achieved by the grant scheme. Most significantly, it is not possible to report forecast reductions of tCO<sub>2</sub>e for REPF-funded projects, meaning the total number reported back to MHCLG only reflected those grants awarded UKSPF funding.

For evaluation purposes, outputs and outcomes presented in the table show what the CAF scheme achieved across all funded projects, regardless of whether the indicator could be recorded for that intervention. No targets have been included as it is not appropriate to assess the success of the scheme against those set for projects with different aims and activities. This enables the CAF to be evaluated on its own merits and demonstrates the actual outputs and outcomes reached, rather than presenting a limited picture.

This approach is consistent with the flexibility permitted under UKSPF reporting guidelines. Instead of working to the targets initially set, MHCLG requested updated forecasts for each indicator in each reporting cycle, allowing authorities to predict what would be realistically achieved and measured by the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2025. MHCLG's monitoring system also permitted authorities to report against any outputs or outcomes achieved, enabling new metrics to be tracked as projects evolved.

Some comparisons can be made between the outputs set for the Net Zero Innovation Fund intervention and CLTF and CAF. The original target for the Net Zero Innovation Fund was to award grants to 10 businesses, with the CLTF aiming to support 20 community organisations with grants over the two year period. This shows that the grants awarded were around the amount estimated to be delivered through those schemes.

The majority of grants awarded were for standard decarbonisation equipment, so could be reported against the number of low or zero carbon energy installations recorded, which could include solar arrays. The number of installations reported

does not match the total number of grants awarded as some projects involved the purchase of specialist equipment which did not meet the definition for this output.

The final output recorded is the number of farm businesses supported. This is a REPF specific output, and as CLTF did not target farm businesses, it was not included as an original target. Farm businesses were not explicitly targeted in the CAF or listed as a priority group, but given their status as both high energy users and less financially resilient than other industries, those that applied tended to score well.

The only outcome recorded is estimated CO2 reduction after a year. As a full year has yet to elapse since the projects completed, the figure of 85t represents a combined total of the estimates produced by the carbon reduction plans submitted. Although each figure has been calculated scientifically using actual data, the accuracy of forecasts is reduced because the amount of energy used can vary greatly from year to year.

There is a contradiction inherent in some of the proposals, where by seeking to create a more efficient and comfortable building, projects will undermine their carbon reduction potential. For example, some grant recipients were unable to open during the winter due to the high energy costs or found that bookings for space were not taken up due to the spaces being too cold or poorly lit. Therefore, by increasing usage of venues, there may be a paradoxical effect where energy usage, bills, and carbon do not reduce, but the assets are better used, generating additional income and wider community benefit.

In the final reports, all projects must report back on their final carbon reduction, using actual energy bills and a respectable carbon calculator to produce the final figures. To support this endeavour, all recipients were invited to attend a training session, delivered under the Carbon Action Programme. This was met with some resistance from grant recipients, who felt unsure of what the reporting requirements were and did not feel well equipped to produce the required figures.

Final reports produced by the CLTF recipients proved the expected challenges in getting accurate final reports. Out of the 185t forecast, CLTF recipients collectively reported a 40.4t reduction in CO2 in the 6 months following their project, although as the forecast and the actuals cover different time periods and energy usage fluctuates throughout the year, this is not an exact comparison. A variety of methods were used to calculate savings, from energy bills, advice from professionals, to sharing figures from solar panel apps. This makes ascertaining their accuracy a challenge, particularly for solar panel apps which use average data to compare energy usage to the same amount of fossil fuel generated energy.

The average cost per tonne of carbon saved was £6,359, but as most of the equipment is expected to continue reducing carbon for 20-25 years, this comes out to around £300 per tonne of carbon per year. The UK's Emissions Trading Scheme set the carbon price per tonne at £64.90 in 2024, a considerable reduction compared to the CAF. If solely viewed as a carbon reduction project, the cost per tonne of carbon would not be considered good value for money, however, there are additional important factors to consider. Firstly, this represents an actual carbon reduction

within the locality, as opposed to the value traded on the market, which is a different offering. Secondly, there are a number of wider benefits which also impact the cost to benefit ratio, including financial and social impacts.

The limited number of CAF final reports received to date present an indication of the benefits resulting from the grants, although the full impact cannot be evaluated until all reports have been received. Even with the support of the Carbon Action Programme, there has not been uniformity in the methodology used to calculate carbon savings, with follow-up requests required to investigate how figures were reached and sense check the data. So far, all reported figures have exceeded the target savings, although it is unclear if this is because of discrepancies in how the forecasts and actual reductions were calculated or because of other factors such as changes in operational energy usage or equipment performing better than expected.

At the application stage, most recipients forecast both economic and social benefits resulting from their projects. A key draw for many applicants was the potential to lower their bills significantly, with many companies offering quotations indicating the likely savings. Of the applicants who included a financial saving in their application form, a total of £103k was expected to either be saved in reduced energy usage or result from increased income. Savings forecast tended to be higher amongst businesses, with an average of £5,300 per project against £3,481 expected by community organisations. This put the average payback period at 10 years for community organisations and 6.8 for businesses, combining for an average of 8.4 years. With the average UK domestic solar install taking 8-12 years to pay back its cost, this shows a quicker return on investment than average by supporting larger venues with higher energy usage.

There were some unexpected benefits forecast by applicants outside of reduced energy bills and increased usage or quality of community venues. One dairy farmer who received a grant said that the commercial purchaser for their milk would pay a higher price if the farm decarbonised. A village hall who installed external LEDs on the outside of the hall said it improved safety in the village, which has no streetlights, so the LEDs enabled residents to see the area around the hall in the dark. There was also an improvement to the resilience and energy independence of organisations, with some rural locations suffering from power outages. The year prior to installation, one village hall reported that there had been a 36 hour power outage in the whole village due to a storm, leaving residents unable to heat their homes. If that were to happen now, the village hall would still be able to turn on its lights and heating, providing a warm and safe place for residents to congregate. A similar benefit was reported by Whimble History Society, which has exhibits of historical importance that require being kept at a specific temperature. By reducing incidences of supply disruption, the artefacts can be kept at the right temperature and humidity required for their preservation.

From those beneficiaries who have submitted their final reports, the majority have realised a financial benefit resulting from smaller energy bills, with only one feeding back that rising energy costs cancelled out the saving. Additionally, one grant recipient reported that a family member had installed panels after they discussed the

positive impact their business had seen, whilst another said that other businesses on their industrial estate had subsequently invested in solar. One recipient was carbon negative following the implementation of their project; a status which led to them being appointed as a small business Sustainability Champion.

The decarbonisation scheme also proved highly effective at keeping spend within the district. In addition to incentivising local procurement in the scoring matrix, EDDC published a list of local renewable energy installers operating in the district. Although this was not an approved supplier list, basic checks were done on all suppliers, and they were contacted to make sure they wanted to be on the list and could provide quotations and carry out works within the time frame. This helped to both provide prospective applicants with a list of businesses to approach for quotes and to raise awareness of the scheme amongst local suppliers so they could prepare for enquiries and, for successful applicants, ensure works were completed on time.

Over £425k from grant and match funding went to East Devon businesses, which was 59% of the total project costs and 73% of the amount awarded by EDDC. This may be due to the incentives provided to encourage the use of local suppliers, but may also be inherent to decarbonisation projects. As suppliers have to provide a service and may have to attend to the building to provide a quote, it is natural that geographically close suppliers would be selected. Regardless of the cause, this demonstrates that decarbonisation grants schemes are incredibly effective in ensuring funding remains within the local area.

## Evaluation Summary

Key Question	Response
1. Was the project effective?	The scheme design was effective at attracting a good number of supportable projects, however its effectiveness in reducing carbon emissions is unknown at this stage.
2. Was the process of implementation efficient?	Reuse of documentation from previous years and the experience gained from delivering other UKSPF grant schemes allowed rapid deployment of the scheme. Dividing applications received into rounds and using a decile ranking system to assist in scoring also helped manage demands on officer time.
3. Did the project provide good value for money?	Value for money was assessed as a key scoring criteria, ensuring projects funded represented good value for money compared against all applications. However, when only comparing the cost per tonne of carbon, this remains far higher than the tradable value on the ETS.
4. Did the project provide additionality?	When it was launched, no similar grant schemes were available locally. The launch of DCC's Green Impact Fund threatened duplication, but there was sufficient demand for decarbonisation funding and good partnership working so that this did not present a significant challenge.

5. Did the project align with the strategic ambitions set out in the UKSPF Investment Plan?	The CAF was not included in the Investment Plan, but it aligns with the ambition to use UKSPF funding to tackle climate change.
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### **Lessons Learnt**

- Grant applicants require expert support to assist in forecasting their carbon reduction and in producing accurate calculations one year after project implementation.
- Demand for decarbonisation support offering advice and guidance is low but coupling the provision with grant funding leads to far higher levels of take up.
- A consistent methodology across projects and a year-long time frame is needed to compare forecasts to actual reductions, for both carbon and costs. Guidance documents and frameworks should be produced and standardised to ensure fair comparison across applicants.
- For new interventions, either the original targets assigned to that budget should be used, or new targets should be set which align with the new spend plan, so the success of projects can be monitored effectively

## Culture Programme Year 3 Evaluation

<b>Project Lead</b>	Sarah Elghady
<b>Intervention</b>	E6: Support for local arts, cultural, heritage and creative activities
<b>Original Allocation</b>	£95,000
<b>Total Spend</b>	£114,469
<b>Year 3 Allocation</b>	£40,000
<b>Year 3 Spend</b>	£56,931

<b>Output</b>	<b>Target (across 3 years)</b>	<b>Achieved (across 3 years)</b>
Number of local events or activities supported	17	54
Number of organisations receiving grants (numerical value)	17	32
Number of organisations receiving non-financial support (numerical value)	17	153
Number of volunteering opportunities supported	50	528
Number of people attending training sessions	150	217
<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Target (across 3 years)</b>	<b>Achieved (across 3 years)</b>
Improved engagement numbers	150	7,778
Improved perception of facilities/amenities	100	14
Number of community-led arts, cultural, heritage and creative programmes as a result of support	1	29
Increased visitor numbers	100	8,318

### Overview

The Culture Programme supported four main activities in Year 3, comprising two new and two continuing projects. Firstly, co-ordination and support for the Arts and Culture East Devon (ACED) network was ongoing, with funding contributing to holding meetings and training sessions. The Creative East Devon Fund (CEDF) grants scheme also returned in Year 3, with a second round supporting 17 arts, cultural, and heritage initiatives across the district.

Year 3 saw the introduction of dedicated support for East Devon's museums, including a series of specialist training sessions and small grants for digital equipment upgrades. Finally, start-up funding was provided to create Screen Devon, a regional screen agency focused on increasing investment into Devon's TV and film industry.

## Activities

The coordination and development of the ACED network involved several work strands. The first was the continuation of network meetings, which are held three times a year in locations of cultural or heritage significance. In Year 3, the Seaton Gateway Theatre, Manor Pavilion Theatre, and Poltimore House acted as host venues, with locations deliberately selected to ensure they were dispersed across the district. Although capacity and attendance varied, the number of attendees averaged out at 34, maintaining parity with previous years.

ACED network members continued to grow, with 203 individuals and organisations signed up by the end of March. This represented a 35% increase within the year, demonstrating a good ability to attract new members and growing awareness of the network. One key driver of sign-ups is the Creative East Devon Fund, which requires all lead applicants to be ACED members. Engagement levels vary, with a core of dedicated members attending all the meetings, volunteering as ACED champions, and leading genre-specific collaborations, whilst others have limited involvement.

The total cost of running and maintaining the ACED network was small, with around £750 spent on meetings, volunteer expenses, and hosting and maintenance fees for the website. This omits the significant amount of officer and volunteer time required to support the network; from the planning and preparation of meetings to keeping the website and newsletter updated with the latest news and opportunities. However, it was always anticipated that this work would largely be resourced via officer time, with the Cultural Strategy outlining a clear commitment to both resourcing and promoting ACED and investing in a Cultural Producer to coordinate the network.

Year 3 saw the introduction of an ACED mentoring scheme, where experienced cultural practitioners were matched with young people in the 18-30 age range looking to work in creative industries. It emerged from Theme 4 of the Cultural Strategy, which seeks to support skills development in young people interested in pursuing a career in arts and culture. Eight ACED members offered to serve as mentors and provide up to six hours of free support over six months. In the end, five mentees received support through the programme. There was minimal cost associated with this scheme, however its operation proved to be significantly more complex and time intensive than anticipated which undermines its ongoing viability.

A key support offer for the ACED network was the continued provision of training sessions. Over the year, 10 training sessions were delivered on a range of topics such as social media advertising and producing live events. Four of these training sessions were specifically for museums, including ones focusing on care and maintenance of collections. The average number of attendees per session was 10, which aligns with previous years and puts the value of each trainee place at £35, including room hire costs. Although sessions continued to be a mix of in-person and online, most were held in person as a survey of members showed this to be the most popular method of delivery.

In the original spend profile, £3,000 was assigned as match funding for a £41,000 Arts Council bid entitled 'Our Wild and Changing Estuaries'. This was a proposed

collaboration between EDDC and three local museums – Exmouth, Fairlynch, and Axe Valley - to unlock, enhance, and digitise their natural science and biodiversity collections. This aligned with the work programme proposed in Theme 2 of the Cultural Strategy to work with local museums to ‘enable displays of natural science and biodiversity collections.’ However, EDDC was notified in January 2025 that the bid had been unsuccessful, necessitating that the £3,000 be spent in an alternate manner.

To maintain the original purpose of the funding, the three museums involved were instead offered a share of the £3,000 as a grant. They each had the opportunity to request up to £1,000 for digital equipment to support the care, accessibility, and digitisation of their collections. As the requests from the three partners was less than the £3,000 budget, the opportunity was widened to all eight museums in the district, with six submitting a request for funding. Although the amount requested surpassed the £3,000, a reduced grant was awarded to Sidmouth to ensure an equitable distribution of funding. The average grant award was £470 and included equipment such as temperature sensors and cameras.

Due to the time constraints and the small sums involved, this process was carried out informally, with requests submitted via email and sums awarded on a first-come-first-served basis. Although the limited number of museums enabled the opportunity to be promoted to all possible beneficiaries, had there been sufficient time, a fairer method of grant distribution would have involved a merit-based assessment of grant requests.

The largest new activity was the £10,000 grant given to Screen Devon to establish a regional screen agency for Devon. Although it was partly supported by the Sustainable Tourism Fund, the larger amount (£7,000) came from the Culture Programme so it will be considered in this evaluation. The concept of a screen agency for Devon originated from the University of Exeter who had been researching the need and potential for Screen Devon since 2022.

In a report published in November 2023, the University outlined the potential benefits of a screen agency to the regional economy, including supporting local skills development, opening up pathways in creative industries, and supporting local tourism and hospitality businesses and tourism industries. There was a clear financial case to invest in Screen Devon, with Creative England estimating that the average film or high-end TV production spends £17,000-£32,000 per day in their filming region. It also demonstrated strong alignment with themes across the Cultural Strategy, including support for cultural tourism and events attracting significant visitor spend, developing opportunities for young people in creative fields, and providing leadership to secure inward investment in East Devon.

In early 2024, EDDC were approached by the team at the University of Exeter seeking funding to set up Screen Devon. At the time, they had agreed partnership contributions from two other districts’ UKSPF budget and several local organisations on board as partners. They presented a business case to both officers and the Leader of the Council for consideration. Following a series of conversations, a

£10,000 budget was reserved from Year 3 funds enable the formation and initial outreach work of Screen Devon.

There were some challenges involved in determining the appropriate contribution to Screen Devon and ensuring the activities aligned with the UKSPF requirements. As Screen Devon works across the whole county, there were concerns that areas who did not financially support the project would see equal or greater benefits than East Devon and there was no means to ensure that the impact within the district would be proportional to our contribution. Officers attempted to mitigate this by encouraging all districts in Devon to part-fund the agency, but this was not successful in getting all parties on board, as Teignbridge and South West Devon did not provide any financial support.

Although this issue could not be fully resolved, EDDC's funding unlocked some additional benefits, including outreach activities and support for local creatives, and greater involvement in the governance and strategic direction of Screen Devon. In the end, it was decided that the benefits to East Devon and the potential value of a regional screen agency were significant enough to warrant the small contribution, regardless of this imbalance.

The second challenge is that pilot projects are ill-suited to the timelines and indicators given for UKSPF projects. With only a single year of delivery and the majority of funding earmarked for setting up costs such as staff salaries, there was weak alignment between the activities carried out and any UKSPF outputs and outcomes. This shows both the limitations of the indicators available and the difficulties of operating on short-term funding cycles as projects need to be given sufficient time to reach their potential and begin producing outcomes.

Where other Culture Programme activities, such as the ACED network, arose directly from the Cultural Strategy, Screen Devon emerged as a new opportunity midway through delivery. Although this flexible and open approach to programme development enables a responsiveness to emerging opportunities, it requires that organisations with potential projects have the relevant knowledge and awareness to approach and engage EDDC. An open call for small projects, evaluated by both officers and members, could be instituted in the future to ensure equality of opportunity.

The final activity undertaken in Year 3 the continuation of the Creative East Devon Fund. With a budget of £37,000 or 65% of the total programme, it accounted for the majority of spend. The popularity, application quality, and output achievement demonstrated in the first round of CEDF presented a clear business case to continue the scheme with an increased allocation.

A key change implemented following feedback from the first round was to keep the fund open for applications for a longer time period to account for seasonal events. Round 2 of the CEDF was open from April 2024 until November 2024, with funding awarded in two sessions in July and December. This ensured events running during the summer could receive funding in time to proceed, whilst also supporting out of season activities to unlock cultural opportunities in the winter months.

The CEDF continued to be popular, with almost £80,000 worth of applications submitted. More importantly, the quality of applications remained strong, with £60,000 worth of projects receiving a recommendation for approval. This far exceeded the £25,000 originally allocated towards the Creative East Devon Fund, but a forecast underspend elsewhere in the UKSPF programme enabled the redirection of £12,000 towards cultural grants.

Successful applications were diverse in both geography, genre, and target audience. The average grant award was £2,176 and only three projects were awarded the full £3,000, which suggests that the funding amounts set were appropriate for the projects coming forward.

### **Outputs, Outcomes, and Impacts**

The Culture Programme proved highly effective at reaching, and in most cases far exceeding, its target outputs and outcomes. The biggest driver of outputs and outcomes was the Creative East Devon Fund, where small amounts of funding were able to engage large numbers of residents and meet a variety of the targets.

The only target which was not achieved was improved perceptions of facilities/amenities, both because it was difficult to measure and because no funded activities focused on capital improvements to cultural institutions. As highlighted in the Year 2 evaluation, the difficulties in achieving these targets is less a reflection on the performance of the programme than it is a demonstration of the challenges of setting outputs for a pilot programme.

As both the indicators and the targets were determined prior to the activities, they were not based on prior experience of similar schemes or linked to an established monitoring system. This is also demonstrated by the overachievement of several targets, which suggests that the numbers selected were too low. With three years of experience delivering the programme, and a stronger understanding of what can be achieved, measured, and reported, targets and key performance indicators for future cultural interventions should be able to be more precise in selecting outputs and benchmark figures.

A significant challenge involved in capturing outcomes and outputs was ensuring CEDF grant recipients provided timely and accurate figures with their reports. Although all grant recipients were provided with the output definitions and given advice on measuring outputs, there was still a huge variance in the quality of data. In lieu of figures, some recipients initially elected to write 'yes' next to the outputs achieved, whilst others provided estimates or rough numbers, especially where the grant went to supporting large events. Not all figures provided could be evidenced and verified by officers, although they were sense checked, with further information requested on precise figures and how data was gathered.

The biggest obstacle encountered in measuring key metrics was adhering to the definitions and guidance provided for certain outcomes, which was both burdensome and logistically difficult. Notes for outcomes such as 'increased engagement numbers' recommended that places metric undertake population level surveys and

conduct a comparison to before and after the intervention. However, conducting large surveys both requires a considerable amount of officer time and has no guarantee of attracting the requisite number of responses to provide an accurate representation of engagement across the district.

Attributing any change to the interventions undertaken was also difficult under the guidance provided. Whilst the definitions recommend high level surveys and tracking the same venues over time, this method of monitoring is not suitable for grant funded activity where a diverse range of venues, organisations, and activities are being supported. Furthermore, as the Culture Programme had a small overall budget which was then distributed in small amounts, the effects are hard to pinpoint when viewed at a larger scale. For example, looking at yearly visitor numbers to a venue where a one-day event was supported would be unlikely to show a statistically significant impact that could be tied to the event.

Therefore, a pragmatic approach was required to ensure outputs and outcomes could be measured without adhering strictly to the guidance provided. As projects monitored participant numbers from their activities, these could be aggregated to provide figures for increased engagement and visitor numbers. Whilst figures may not be exact in all cases, they do provide an accurate picture of the reach of the programme and indicative numbers of beneficiaries.

Evaluating the effectiveness of the Culture Programme requires looking beyond the outputs and outcomes and assessing the impacts against the strategic aims of the Cultural Strategy and Investment Plan. These impacts show how the funded projects were able to strengthen the cultural offer in the district whilst creating paid opportunities for creatives, promoting climate action, and increasing wellbeing amongst participants. As with outputs and outcomes, these are easiest to measure for the CEDF, where reports from recipients were structured around the Culture Strategy themes.

One key theme of both the Investment Plan and the Cultural Strategy is expanding creative opportunities for young people. Whilst the Investment Plan focuses on young adults and links to the overall lifestyle offer, the report template for the CEDF combines children and young adults, making it hard to determine how many young adults benefited. However, it was clear that an increased number of projects engaged young adults, with projects such as Exmouth Film Festival and the Arkham Dispatch immersive mystery game designed to appeal to that age group. Additionally, Get Together, a series of concerts for adults affected by dementia, created four paid opportunities for musicians aged 16-25.

Four of the CEDF projects were primarily focused on stimulating conversation about climate change and nature recovery. East Devon Women and the Sea engaged Exmouth sea swimmers to create a podcast exploring their relationship to the water and how pollution threatens the natural landscape. Journey Songs took schoolchildren in Seaton out to the wetlands and taught them about the culture and natural environment of their local area, with parents reporting that children had a stronger awareness of climate issues after participating. Biocycles by the Grove was an experimental outdoor workshop where participants were immersed in nature and

encouraged to produce art inspired by their surroundings. The Words on Wildlife offering at the Budleigh Literary Festival had children celebrating wildlife, and the natural world, with participants growing their own seedlings and learning about different animals and plants.

The strongest impact was on participants wellbeing, which recurred throughout funded projects. Some had improved wellbeing as a core focus, for example Blind Spot, a play encouraging men to talk about their mental health, and Get Together, which supported adults suffering from dementia. However, even activities which didn't have this as an explicit focus reported this as a side benefit, such as 100% of participants in the Four of Swords immersive theatre school agreeing or strongly agreeing that the programme improved their wellbeing. Parent feedback of school children who participated in the Journey Songs project said their children were more confident after attending sessions. This demonstrates clearly the effectiveness of cultural engagement in improving mental wellbeing and self-confidence.

More time is required to determine the effectiveness of Screen Devon, as the agency needs to develop and establish itself before it can field enquiries. As the funding went to set up costs, such as hiring staff, marketing the service, and creating databases of regional companies and freelancers, it was not expected that it would lead to fruitful enquiries. Some outputs were created due to support offered to organisations and businesses through an outreach event, but additional monitoring is required to determine if Screen Devon has achieved its aims.

Assessing the impact of the ACED network meetings and training sessions is difficult without the formal reporting systems associated with grants. Although participants are asked for feedback, the response rate is often low, and a balance needs to be struck between monitoring impact and avoiding survey fatigue. Evaluation forms received following training sessions show the training was the correct level, contained valuable learning, and was of high quality. Over the three-year programme, participation numbers and feedback have been able to inform the training catalogue, with popular sessions re-run and the training providers selected based on their ratings from beneficiaries.

Feedback from mentees involved in the mentoring scheme has all been positive, with beneficiaries citing increased confidence, a clearer vision, and practical advice on business growth as key takeaways. Mentees also cited the benefit to connecting with other creatives, which is a core aspiration of the ACED network.

Overall, the Culture Programme demonstrated a high level of efficacy in achieving a diverse range of outputs, outcomes, and impacts, with funded activities demonstrating strong alignment with the aims and actions outlined in the Cultural Strategy.

## Evaluation Summary

Key Question	Response
1. Was the project effective?	The programme was able to achieve and exceed the majority of its output and outcome targets, whilst demonstrating positive progress towards the aims and vision of the Culture Strategy.
2. Was the process of implementation efficient?	The continuation of activity from previous years smoothly transitioned into Year 3, but there were some challenges in implementing new projects. Schemes such as the mentoring programme required higher amounts of officer time than planned and navigating the complex governance arrangements for Screen Devon also caused some challenges.
3. Did the project provide good value for money?	The project was able to achieve good value for money on two accounts. Firstly, the level of output and outcome achievement was high compared to the overall cost of the programme. Secondly, cost per beneficiary for activities carried out in previous years remained stable, suggesting costs incurred were reasonable.
4. Did the project provide additionality?	All funded activity represented new and unique provisions for arts and culture in the district and did not duplicate existing work.
5. Did the project align with the strategic ambitions set out in the UKSPF Investment Plan?	The programme demonstrated good alignment with the opportunities identified in the Investment Plan, including increased civic pride, expanding access to culture, and supporting nature recovery. There was a stronger alignment than previous years with the ambition to improve the cultural offer for young adults, although there were some difficulties in measuring this.

## Lessons Learnt

- Instigating a formal approach to inviting and assessing proposals from third parties would demonstrate a more equitable process for handling enquiries whilst enabling a quick response to emerging opportunities
- When identifying the impact on young people, feedback forms should distinguish between young adults and children to capture alignment with different strategic aims
- Case studies or testimonials from ACED network members would assist in evaluating the effect of the network and identifying where positive impacts can be attributed to UKSPF activity
- Where UKSPF outputs and outcomes fail to accurately capture the impact of a funded project, additional, specialised key performance indicators should be included to ensure projects meet their stated aims
- Capturing all outcomes of larger projects requires follow-on reporting six-months after the delivery period ends

- Uncertainty regarding future funding streams mean projects must consider their longevity from the outset and alternative income sources or legacies that can replace UKSPF funding

## East Devon Towns Feasibility Work Year 3 Evaluation

<b>Project Lead</b>	Marie Ainsworth
<b>Intervention</b>	E31: Funding to support relevant feasibility studies
<b>Total Allocation</b>	£105,000
<b>Year 3 Original Allocation</b>	£35,000
<b>Year 3 Revised Allocation</b>	£40,455
<b>Year 3 Spend</b>	£40,455

<b>Output</b>	<b>Target (across 3 years)</b>	<b>Achieved (across 3 years)</b>
Number of feasibility studies developed as a result of support	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Target (across 3 years)</b>	<b>Achieved (across 3 years)</b>
Number of projects arising from funded feasibility studies	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>

### Background

Following the completion of feasibility studies for Honiton, Ottery, and Sidmouth in previous year, focus turned to Exmouth for Year 3 of UKSPF. EDDC embarked on development of an Exmouth Placemaking Plan (EPP) in 2022, with a draft plan shared in January 2024 for both public and member consultation. Although this remained in draft stage throughout Year 3, the recommendations in the EPP and the Placemaking in Exmouth Town and Seafront Group (PETS) established to oversee its development and implementation provided a good foundation for the feasibility work.

The Draft EPP proposed 13 short-term interventions which could be implemented within the next three years. These included project ideas such as a signage strategy, a study on business occupancy, and creating opportunities for arts and culture. Of these 13 interventions, two met the scale, price, and timeline to be considered for feasibility work under UKSPF. These were to ‘strengthen the experience at Queen’s Drive’ and to ‘transform Beach Gardens Car Park into public space’.

Queen’s Drive Space (QDS) is an events, recreation, and entertainment space on the Exmouth esplanade. It previously underwent refurbishment in 2017/18 to create a multi-functional visitor attraction providing play and fitness equipment and food and drink offerings. The opportunity identified in the EPP is to extend this provision to the rear of QDS and create a new, inclusive events space with space for public art, lighting, and seating.

Beach Gardens is a small carpark right on the seafront that is used by both beachgoers and visitors to the nearby Exmouth Pavilion theatre. It is approximately 1000sqm and contains 26 car parking spaces and is situated between two green

spaces that are used for fairs and sheltered seating with a beach view. The proposed intervention would remove the car park to unite the greens to create an integrated public space.

Considerable work was required to transform these concepts into implementable projects, not all of which could be accommodated within the UKSPF budget. Therefore, the Year 3 funding was used to get both interventions to RIBA stage 2 (concept design). The final studies produced included a feasibility and options study, cost estimates for both sites, a planning appraisal, and a topographical study.

## **Activities**

The first stage of implementation was to undergo a procurement process for the studies. A specification was drawn up which provided the background to the sites, the scope of the work, and the objectives for each project. The studies were procured jointly, with a single tender and pricing schedule for the package of work. The only exception was the topographical work which was procured separately.

An open procurement exercise was launched in Summer 2024 with a total contract value of £45,000, with the shortfall from UKSPF topped up by remaining budget from the Exmouth Placemaking work. The tender attracted significant interest, with 18 consultants bidding for the work.

The highest scoring bid came from an abnormally low tender, with the cost well below the £45,000 contract value. This led to complications in awarding the contract, and as the UKSPF funds required the project to be delivered to a tight deadline, the project officers decided to annul the process and look to issue a direct award from a framework.

Appointing from the framework was far less time intensive than open procurement, and AHR building consultancy were awarded the contract in December 2024, less than a month after the first process was aborted. Lewis Brown was commissioned to produce a topographical survey of the site, which was necessary to understand any technical challenges involved in site delivery. This cost £5,500, and the remaining funding went to AHR for the two feasibility studies.

In the initial tender evaluation, a 60/40 quality/price weighting was used to score bids. Since the budget was fixed and the specification was clear on the expected scope of the work, a greater weighting towards the quality element may have been more effective in determining the strongest bidder. This could also have avoided some of the initial challenges experienced with the abnormally low tender.

Despite the tight timeframe, all feasibility work was completed by the deadline, with the studies finalised in the last week of March. Once received, the work was presented to the Placemaking in Exmouth Town and Seafront Group for their consideration, including the costs required to realise the vision set forth.

No further projects or additional feasibility work has been conducted on any of the sites featured in Year 1 and 2 studies since the Year 2 evaluation was published.

## Findings

The study outlined a vision for Beach Gardens as a bustling community and visitor space with a beachfront view. Three options were presented from 'light touch' to the preferred option of creating a permanent beachside concessions space. For all options, enabling works would be required to remove walls and improve access via steps and ramps. Option 1 involved altering the green spaces to relandscape the gardens, improve the power cabling, and increase the number of footpaths, with Option 2 also changing the car park to a market square area. The third and preferred Option expanded on these to create permanent spaces for events and concessions with a food and drink courtyard.

If implemented, these works would enhance the concession and events offer along the seafront, including capacity to host more fairground amenities in peak season. Furthermore, it would improve access from the town to the seafront and improve safety by pedestrianising the area. The study detailed the necessary work to enact these options, particularly the engineering work needed to navigate site constraints such as surface water and flooding risks.

The vision for Queens Drive Space was to transform the site into a regional destination for play that would attract both locals and tourists. The proposals were intended to capitalise on the existing offer and increase spend at the concessions stands as a source of income generation. As with Beach Gardens, three options were put forward for the site.

Option 1 proposed creating new concession stands along the western boundary of the site, improving access by creating new pedestrian routes, and creating an events space with a temporary stage which could be used for both events and concessions. Under Option 2, a larger play area was proposed, with the option for a permanent events space to the south of the site. Option 3, the preferred option, involved two flexible play and leisure areas, with a mixed-use building accompanied by a café and courtyard.

The redesign of the site necessary to bring forward any of these plans included thinning of trees and hedges, moving and creating new footpaths through the space, and expanding the surrounding car parks.

A planning appraisal for both Beach Gardens and Queens Drive Space conducted as part of the feasibility work concluded that the proposed development options at both sites were consistent with the Local Plan policies and in keeping with previous permissions awarded on the sites.

The estimated cost to bring forward the preferred option on both sites is £9,790,000; £4,160,000 for Beach Gardens and £5,630,000 for Queens Drive Space. The

majority of this, around £8.2m, relate to building costs, with the remaining £1.6 for professional and statutory fees and charges. Although these works could be packaged up into smaller projects to reduce the costs involved, the cost estimates are not structured to show where works could be broken down and stages to enact the different options presented.

### **Outputs, Outcomes, and Impacts**

Only one output and one outcome are recorded for the UKSPF Feasibility Work. The two feasibility studies for Exmouth raised the total number of completed studies to five against a target of three, however the outcome achievement remained at zero. This demonstrates that whilst the project was successful at commissioning and producing feasibility studies, there was limited scope to take forward any resulting project proposals within the three year period.

The [Year 2 evaluation](#) highlighted several reasons why Feasibility Work was unable to achieve any outcomes in its first two years, all of which remain valid. Some of these challenges are inherent to feasibility work, since all studies carry the risk that projects will not be found to be feasible. The lack of outcomes does not necessarily mean that there has been no impact or utility to the study, as they are important for deepening knowledge and understanding around what is possible on a site and identifying the level of funding required to bring projects forward.

The timeline for the Exmouth feasibility studies also made any outcomes within 2024/25 impossible, as the work was only completed in the final week of March. However, none of the feasibility studies funded in Years 1 and 2 have advanced towards viable projects in the time since their completion, so the lack of outcomes cannot be solely attributed to the short time frame. Although the size and scope of the capital projects identified would require considerable time and additional work to bring forward, the lack of progress indicates that they are unlikely to be realised.

There remains the possibility that future funding opportunities, such as those arising from devolution, could provide the necessary capital to bring forward these projects. In these instances, having a suite of 'shovel-ready' projects could be an asset in securing funding in a competitive process. However, this comes with the risk that the relevancy of the study could decline in the interim, as costs fluctuate, and the wider context causes shifts in strategic priorities or creates additional constraints.

For this reason, development of feasibility studies should be linked to credible funding opportunities, which could include central government schemes or internal ones like the Place and Prosperity Fund. Even if funding is not secured or guaranteed, having a potential scheme in place ensures that feasibility studies can provide the requisite details to make a proposal viable and increases the likelihood of the project progressing before it becomes out of date.

The Year 1 and 2 evaluations identified the need for feasibility studies to have a stronger alignment with broader work done by EDDC and concentrate on assets where the Council is able to exert influence. Some positive steps towards this were taken in Year 3 as the studies were connected to the larger strategic plans for the Exmouth seafront. Additionally, the Council Plan commitment to deliver ‘infrastructure projects across the district through Placemaking Plans’ demonstrates internal buy-in to invest in the interventions identified in the EPP. It is too early to determine if focusing on EDDC assets does increase the number of resultant projects, but it does provide EDDC with greater levels of agency to advance projects to the next stage.

Insufficient budget across UKSPF to commit to carrying out capital works, coupled with the short delivery window, prevented the creation of an integrated programme whereby projects identified through feasibility work could receive capital funding from UKSPF. This remained a major challenge in Year 3, as the absence of current or forthcoming funding opportunities severely limits the likelihood of projects going forward in the near future.

### Evaluation Summary

Key Question	Response
1. Was the project effective?	The project was effective at producing the feasibility studies for Exmouth within the required timeframe but was not effective at generating any regeneration projects in any of the sites considered throughout the three-year programme.
2. Was the process of implementation efficient?	The need to change from an open procurement exercise to a framework delayed the appointment of contractors and shortened the delivery window significantly. The framework approach proved far more efficient in rapid appointment of consultants than the open procurement exercise.
3. Did the project provide good value for money?	The cost per site for the feasibility work was comparable to studies undertaken in previous years. Although the budget was fixed, as the procurement was scored 60/40 on price/quality, the successful consultant needed to demonstrate competitiveness on price, ensuring good value for money.
4. Did the project provide additionality?	There are no other internal or external budgets allocated to the development of feasibility studies. The work provides additionality by building on the visions and interventions laid out in the Exmouth Placemaking Plan to develop project concepts.
5. Did the project align with the strategic ambitions set out in the UKSPF Investment Plan?	The feasibility studies delivered on some of the aims laid out in the Investment Plan, including identifying opportunities for development to promote the local economic, social, and cultural offer. However, the project has moved away from the original ambition to focus on town centres and some

	elements, such as scoping innovative funding models, have not been explored in the work produced.
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## Lessons Learnt

- Feasibility Work should be aligned with capital funding opportunities to ensure there are credible options for implementing identified projects before studies become outdated.
- Cost estimates produced should relate to the different options presented in the feasibility studies to give indicative costs of bringing forward each of the options considered.
- The use of procurement frameworks is a more efficient method of appointing consultants than open procurement, especially with a rigid and short-term spend deadline.
- Greater weight should be awarded to quality scores in procurement exercises where the budget is fixed.
- Project Leads should review the Investment Plan when engaging in new project activity to ensure the work aligns with the original intentions and strategic aims of the programme.
- Monitoring outcomes of feasibility studies requires a longer timeline and this should continue to be tracked beyond the UKSPF-funded period.

## Employment Hub Year 3 Evaluation

<b>Project Lead</b>	Zoë Smith
<b>Intervention</b>	E33: Employment support for economically inactive people
<b>Total Allocation</b>	£145,180
<b>Year 3 Allocation</b>	£145,180
<b>Year 3 Spend</b>	£145,180

<b>Output</b>	<b>Target (2024/25)</b>	<b>Achieved</b>
Number of people supported to engage in job-searching	53	63
Number of effective engagements between keyworkers and additional services	13	99
Number of economically inactive people engaging with keyworker support services	53	46
Number of people accessing mental and physical health support leading to employment	13	18
Number of people receiving support to gain employment	53	28
Number of socially excluded people accessing support	53	123
<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Target (2024/25)</b>	<b>Achieved</b>
Number of economically inactive individuals engaging with benefits system following support	13	11
Number of people engaged in job-searching following support	13	53
Number of people in employment, including self-employment, following support	23	28
Number of people in supported employment	10	14
Number of people reporting increased employability through development of interpersonal skills funded by UKSPF	53	115
Number of people sustaining employment for 6 months	53	4
Number of people sustaining engagement with keyworker support and additional services	53	22

### Background

The UKSPF Investment Plan originally set out three different programmes/activities which fit under the 'People and Skills' theme. The government confirmed that UKSPF funding could only be allocated to P&S activity in Year 3 of the programme (2024/25), as other legacy EU funded programmes were still operating in the previous two financial years. As a result, P&S activity set out in the Investment Plan was intentionally broad and high-level, allowing for flexibility later in the programme.

When developing the Investment Plan, Devon County Council, who typically lead on skills and employability-based work in the local area, approached district councils to help identify local need and advise on where funding might be best directed. Two of the three activities identified were a Disability Employment Support Programme and a NEET Employment Support Programme (NEET refers to 'not in education, employment or training').

The purpose of these two programmes was to provide targeted support to tackle unemployment and economic activity, with one focus on helping people with disabilities to improve their employment opportunities, and the other providing flexible one-to-one employability support for young people aged 15-18 who are NEET.

Following further discussions with colleagues at DCC, an alternative approach was suggested, where four 'Future Employment Hubs' would be created, one of which would be based in East Devon. The Hubs would serve as 'one-front door' for individuals seeking employability support, including those facing barriers such as mental and physical disabilities, low confidence levels and poor mental health or basic skills gaps. Support was not to be restricted by age group and sought to target anyone who is economically inactive/unemployed and looking for support.

A desktop review of existing activity took place to identify gaps in provision, with a clear aim not to duplicate or fragment the existing landscape. The mapping exercise showed many initiatives had already ended or were operating on a wider geography, with no clear opportunities emerging to continue or expand existing programmes.

With only one year of funding available and a short mobilisation window, alignment with a wider programme was the most feasible route to delivering employability support. As data for skills is produced at a county level, it was hard to determine district specific skills needs, but the evidence suggested similar challenges were experienced across the county. Although the existing (Exeter) Hub only targeted young people, the model could be scaled up and deployed in the short time frame. This could also build on previous learnings from the Exeter Hub which, along with economies of scale, could not have been achieved if EDDC established the Hub independently of DCC.

This approach was approved by the UKSPF Programme Management Panel, and a funding agreement was signed enabling the council to pass UKSPF funding to DCC to project manage the establishment and operation of an Employment Hub. The DCC proposal set out a higher budget request compared to the original budget set out in the Investment Plan. However, the budget proposal for the other P&S project, the Retrofit Programme, was lower than expected. This allowed for a small reallocation between budgets.

Working alongside delivery partners, it was agreed that Honiton was the preferred location, given its higher rates of deprivation, proximity to the area's Jobcentre Plus

(JCP), and its relatively accessible transport routes from other towns and parishes. The Beehive was chosen as the preferred location within the town, as it was within walking distance of the station, the Jobcentre Plus, and a recognisable community venue.

## **Activities**

The Honiton Employment Hub opened in July 2024 for drop-ins and referrals, initially only three days a week (Mon-Wed), but increasing to five days a week once a second member of staff was appointed. The Hub's two members of staff were both experienced in providing support to individuals in the context of employment, training and skills and have combined expertise working across a wide age group.

Users would meet with one of the Hub staff to work out their needs/interests and continue to work with their caseworker for as long or short a time as necessary. This included sitting together and looking at job applications/training courses. Staff would look at what barriers the person was experiencing and how they could overcome that, for example looking at travel options – one method of support could as simple as running through a bus route. In some instances, clients would use the Hub as a quiet and safe space to work independently. All throughout, the caseworker would serve as their champion, helping to grow their confidence, sharing opportunities that may be of interest, and helping them to open up.

Another key feature of the Hub model is to act as a triage service for other, existing, training and services. For example, the Hub linked up with Learn Devon (also managed by DCC), enabling clients to take short courses which increased their likelihood of gaining employment, such as customer service and digital skills for example. A 'supported employment' provision was procured by the Hub team to provide employment to those with learning difficulties. This was delivered by the Launchpad Café in Budleigh Salterton, providing hands-on experience in catering, hospitality, customer service, and food safety. Engagement with Honiton's Jobcentre Plus also featured throughout the delivery window, becoming a core source of referrals.

Marketing of available services was scaled up throughout the launch. This was to ensure the team were not overwhelmed with enquiries from the outset. Towards the end of the year, the team utilised paid Facebook adverts and posts on the Devon County Council Facebook page. This helped to attract at least ten new clients to the Hub.

As staff continued to gear-up the service, they started to explore an outreach service. This would involve a member of the Hub team locating in community assets in other East Devon towns for one day per week, for those clients unable to travel to Honiton. This was originally trialled in Sidmouth, which led to some positive outcomes but demand was not high enough to warrant continuing. Exmouth was also piloted, but the space used was not private and unsuitable for confidential

conversations. With demand at the Honiton Hub reaching capacity, the outreach trialling was put on hold. This helped to ensure the main Hub was not under-resourced. For those unable to reach Honiton, or preferring an online introduction, Hub services were also available digitally.

The forecast budget for the Hub is shown below. As the Hub was not fully resourced until a few months after its soft launch, the Hub forecast an underspend at the end of the financial year. Marketing and overheads were also lower than expected as limited promotion of the services was sufficient to generate high demand. The underspend went to help cover non-budgeted DCC staff cost, with savings helping to keep the Hub going after the end of the financial year, bridging the gap between April and when further funding came available a few months later.

<b>Type of cost</b>	<b>Budget</b>
Project manager: 25% of 1FTE G Grade	£13,284.81
Level 1 (Full Needs Assessment, coordination, warm handover) - 3 days/week F grade (SCP 26)	£28,789.20
Level 2 (youth hub type intervention) - 4 days/week E grade (SCP 19)	£32,667.20
Level 3 (Supported employment - contracted) – 10 individuals	£35,000.00
Premises in Honiton and set up costs	£8,599.03
Marketing	£2,935.01
Overheads (including finance, legal, procurement support; online support; utilities; stationary; travel expenditures; office equipment and supplies)	£24,631.34
TOTAL hub costs	£145,179.11
Available budget from East Devon	£145,180

## **Outputs, Outcomes, and Impacts**

Despite the Hub not opening until Q2 of the financial year, almost all output and outcome targets were exceeded. It should be noted that the Employment Hub programme was assigned the most different types of output and outcome, with 6 for the former and 7 for the latter. This was likely due to there being better alignment and choice between programme objectives and the outputs/outcomes on offer from MHCLG's list. It was also easier for officers to link delivery to impact in a way which was much harder for other projects, such as estimating the impact of a UKSPF funded festival on tourist numbers for example.

A total of 123 East Devon residents were supported, either through the Honiton or the Exeter hubs. Referral data shows that 39% of clients referred came from Honiton, higher than any other settlement. This was most likely due to the proximity to the Hub and ease of access. Referrals from those residing in the west of the district may have been lower as access to the Exeter Hub may have been preferred. Given that 61% of referrals came from outside of Honiton, locating a Hub in any particular locality will always present accessibility issues for at least some users.

<b>Post code</b>	<b>Approx. area</b>	<b>No of Referrals</b>	<b>Per cent</b>
EX14	Honiton	48	39%
EX12	Seaton	15	12%
EX5	Cranbrook/Whimble	14	11%
EX8	Exmouth	12	10%
EX10	Sidmouth	10	8%
EX13	Axminster	8	7%
EX11	Ottery St Mary	7	6%
EX9	Budleigh Salterton	4	3%
EX24	Colyton	3	2%
EX1	Pinhoe	1	1%
EX4	Broadclyst	1	1%

Data also shows that self-referrals and referrals from JCP account for most of the clients received. In some instances, referrals travelled in the opposite direction, with Hub users being directed towards JCP support. Almost half of clients were economically inactive. This shows good alignment with the original strategic intention of this project, which was to help reduce economic inactivity. Those who regarded themselves as having a disability made up 50% of referrals, with young people, making up 46%. These groups were the intended beneficiaries of the original Disability and a NEET employment support programmes, so their high levels of representation amongst Hub clients showed that the change in delivery model preserved the strategic ambitions from the Investment Plan.

<b>Category</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Self-referrals	56	41%
Job Centre referrals	42	31%
Community Org referrals	20	15%
DCC referrals	17	13%
Economically Inactive	75	47%
Unemployed	48	30%
In Work	37	23%
Disabled	81	50%
16-24	74	46%
25-49	20	33%
50+	36	21%

It should also be noted that the same individual may have received different types of support, and will therefore be recorded under more than one type of output or outcome.

28 people who were either unemployed or economically inactive, were reported as being in employment, including self-employment, for at least two weeks following support. This was against a target of 23. Although this only represents around 19%

of referrals, it should be noted that 23% of those supported were already in work, whilst others may have secured employment after the short monitoring window.

The Hub was deliberately person-centred and focussed on getting the best outcome for the user. For example, someone may be encouraged onto a training course in the hope of getting a better career long term, rather than being compelled to take any available job regardless of suitability. This is a key distinction between the Hub and JCP – that the journey of the person and getting the best outcome for them is more important than simply making sure they get a job.

Some outcomes require a significant proportion of time to measure, such as ‘number of people sustaining employment for 6 months’. As six months had not passed for most clients by the time this metric was measured, this outcome figure should not be interpreted as a measure of performance overall. DCC have since confirmed that follow-up surveys showed 17 people had sustained work for at least 6 months, and they all remain in employment, with two individuals in different jobs to the original roles. However, only 25 out of the 28 individuals supported responded to the survey, so we do not have a complete picture of outcomes and impact.

Other outcomes include those who were economically inactive and engaged in job-searching following support. Against a target of 13, a total of 53 was achieved. 14 people were able to remain in work and develop or progress in work following support through the Hub, against a target of 10 people. One of the outcomes significantly overachieved their target. 115 people reported increased employability through development of interpersonal skills funded the Hub against a target of just 53 people. This relates to the acquisition or improvement of interpersonal skills relevant to employment and skills settings, including but not limited to confidence, communication skills, working with others, time management, motivation to work or do training. Given the Hub’s focus on developing soft skills and providing mental health support alongside employment support, the overachievement of this target is not surprising.

The target and budget for supported employment (delivered through the Launchpad Café) was for 10 people. However, due to drop-outs and then sign-ups, the cohort was slightly bigger with 14 people going through the whole programme. Initial monitoring after the financial year of delivery showed that 5 of these beneficiaries went on to gain non-supported work. Given that those supported were typically the furthest from the labour market, in many cases with significant learning difficulties, a conversion rate of 36% is generally considered a good result compared to similar schemes.

Of the 123 people supported, 11 economically inactive people not previously on benefits were reported as now being in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance or Universal Credit following support. Although this outcome derives a cost rather than a saving or income to the taxpayer, there is a likelihood that receipt of benefits may have helped to alleviate some of the effects of poverty, which in turn can help to

lower the physical and mental barriers to job seeking. We are unable to confirm how many of those 11 people are still in receipt of benefits or whether they have subsequently gained employment.

### **Value for Money**

In terms of evaluating whether good value for money has been achieved, we cannot isolate how much of the budget allocated to the Hub was spend on achieving a particular target. However, a minimum cost per output/outcome figure can be calculated based on the total allocation and each of the outputs/outcomes. For example, if we divide the total allocation (£145,180) by the number of clients who are now in work following support (28) this comes to around £5,185 per person. If we assume that each of the 28 people supported went onto earn the minimum wage, working five days (37.5 hours) a week, they would likely pay around £1,350 in income tax and national insurance per year, suggesting payback to the taxpayer of around 3.8 years.

This is a simplified model, and in reality any estimated payback figure will vary significantly depending on each person supported. Some of those individuals may be on a higher wage, or work fewer hours, or may no longer be employed at all. It also does not factor in other taxes paid, such as employers' national insurance for example, nor any savings to the taxpayer from lower benefit payments. As such, it is difficult to confirm with absolute certainty whether good value for money was achieved on this outcome. However, given the number of people now in work and the budget deployed, acknowledging that only some of that budget was allocated to achieve this particular outcome, it is reasonable to assume the programme delivered good value for money and a reasonably low payback for the taxpayer.

Value for money should not just be considered in financial terms. Positive impacts relating to social inclusion, health and wellbeing should be valued in their own right. Although the Investment Plan placed an emphasis on supporting younger people, the decision was taken for the Hub to be open for all age groups to access support. For example, those who had retired early who were looking to go back into work but may have lacked the confidence or digital skills to seek employment independently. The Hub was accessible to all and branded as such, rather than as a Youth Hub that's also open to older people.

Lastly, it should be noted that staff at the Beehive in Honiton have noticed a 'definite' increase in footfall to the building following the Hub's establishment. Although this cannot be quantified, this footfall has benefited the café to some degree, demonstrating wider indirect benefits of locating the Hub at this venue

## Case Studies

The case studies below show how combining and linking employability support with mental health and social exclusion support has resulted in a positive outcome social and economic outcome.

Case study 1: A young person, initially anxious and uncertain about her career path, she had previously worked in several unstable jobs. With the guidance and support from the Employment and Skills Hub, she explored various options. The salary and prospects of a pharmacy technician were highlighted, leading her to decide on pursuing an apprenticeship. The Employment Hub diligently searched for apprenticeship opportunities and found a suitable pharmacy role. Despite initial setbacks, she persevered and eventually secured an apprenticeship role.

Case Study 2: A young man in his early 20s was struggling to find work and lacked confidence, partly due to not having a GCSE in Maths. With support from the Employment Hub team, he enrolled in evening classes to retake Maths and explored career options. After expressing interest in plumbing, he joined a Level 1 course at PGL Training and later progressed to Level 2. To support himself financially, he secured a part-time job at a local pub. He is now on track to complete his plumbing training and GCSE Maths by summer 2025, aiming for an Army plumbing apprenticeship.

Case Study 3: After 27 years in the merchant navy, a client left work to care for his wife and was unable to work due to health issues. Referred by the Job Centre, he wanted to upskill in IT for future employment. With support from the Employment Hub, he completed several Learn Devon courses, including digital literacy and cyber security, and improved his confidence with basic IT skills. He now feels ready for part-time work and is applying for roles in a café and a library.

## Evaluation Summary

Key Question	Response
1. Was the project effective?	Yes, the project overachieved on most outputs and outcomes with only two, which were more difficult to measure, under-achieving. There was good alignment between the original intentions of the project and the resulting impacts.
2. Was the process of implementation efficient?	Yes, the project demonstrated good cross-organisational working between EDDC and DCC. Although the scaling up of staff resource took longer than expected, this did not have any significant adverse impact on implementation.
3. Did the project provide good value for money?	Although measuring value for money is complex when there is not a clear link between cost and output/outcome delivery, it is reasonable to assume that good value for money was achieved.

4. Did the project provide additionality?	Yes, there was no other provision which provided triaging, combining employability support with mental health and social exclusion support.
5. Did the project align with the strategic ambitions set out in the UKSPF Investment Plan?	Although the Investment Plan was intentionally ambiguous about how this support would be delivered, the demographic data from Hub users shows that the intended groups (those who are NEET and/or disabled) were supported, without locking out others who required support.

## Lessons Learnt

- Delays in scaling up staff resource impacted the ability to trial outreach services and limited flexibility. Future projects should ensure recruitment and onboarding are prioritised to avoid bottlenecks.
- While Honiton was a strategic choice, 61% of referrals came from outside the town, showing that a single hub cannot fully overcome geographic barriers. Outreach and digital options need to be planned from the outset with clear resourcing.
- The Hub reached capacity quickly despite minimal promotion. This suggests strong latent demand for person-centred employability support. Future programmes should anticipate high uptake for this type of support and plan scalable delivery models.
- The Hub’s emphasis on confidence-building and tailored support was key to achieving outcomes beyond employment (e.g., mental health improvements, interpersonal skills). This approach should be embedded in future employability schemes.
- Metrics like “sustained employment for 6 months” were hard to capture within the reporting window. Future projects should allocate resource and time for post-programme monitoring to evidence impact, even when this isn’t a requirement of the funder.

## Innovation and Resilience Fund Year 3 Evaluation

<b>Project Lead</b>	Tom Winters
<b>Intervention</b>	1.1 Funding (capital grants) for small scale investment in micro and small enterprises in rural areas E29: Supporting decarbonisation and improving the natural environment whilst growing the local economy
<b>Total Allocation</b>	£636,554
<b>Original Year 3 Allocation</b>	£320,362
<b>Revised Year 3 Allocation:</b>	£292,772
<b>Year 3 Spend</b>	£292,772

<b>Output</b>	<b>Target (across 3 years)</b>	<b>Achieved (across 3 years)</b>
Number of farm businesses supported	5	4
Number of farm diversification projects supported	5	2
Number of micro businesses supported	10	15
Number of organisations receiving grants	20	27
<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Target (across 3 years)</b>	<b>Achieved (across 3 years)</b>
Number of businesses adopting new technologies or processes to the firm	20	12
Number of businesses with improved productivity	20	7
Number of businesses experiencing growth	20	7
Jobs created as a result of support	15	19
Jobs safeguarded as a result of support	12	20

### Background

Originally created post-Covid to support businesses to recover and grow, two additional rounds of the Innovation and Resilience Fund (IRF) grant scheme have been run via core UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) funding. Amendments have been made with each iteration of the scheme to align with government funding requirements, target investment to align with strategic objectives, and increase the number of high-quality applications submitted.

IRF2 saw lower levels of demand than anticipated, likely due to the introduction of a 50% match-funding requirement and pathway approach, which required projects to fit into one of three categories. With a far larger budget available for IRF3, it was

necessary to increase the flexibility of the scheme to facilitate applications and market the opportunity more heavily.

Where IRF2 was funded jointly through UKSPF core and REPF, IRF3 was solely REPF-funded, which introduced some additional restrictions on how the funding could be spent. Businesses within the urban area of Exmouth were ineligible for funding, as were farm businesses looking to expand their operations within agriculture.

With REPF funding confirmed in advance of Year 3, the scheme was able to launch immediately, with the Expression of Interest (EOI) form going live on the 8<sup>th</sup> of April. Applicants had until the 24<sup>th</sup> of May to submit their full bid, allowing for a 7-week application window.

## **Activities**

Prior to the scheme launch, amendments to the IRF3 Policy needed to be drafted and signed off by the UKSPF Panel. These were informed by the learnings from IRF2, with several significant changes made to increase the number of applications received and simplify the marketing message to prospective applicants.

One change made was to reduce the match funding requirement from 50% to 30%. Whilst this went against the commitment in the Investment Plan to leverage 50% investment from the private sector, it was hoped that some recipients would volunteer a significantly higher amount of match funding, leading to an average around the 50% mark. Although businesses offering additional match above the 30% minimum were awarded points in the scoring matrix, 36% of applicants did not offer any additional match and 87% offered less than 50%, meaning there was little competitive disadvantage to businesses only meeting the required minimum. This aligns with the conclusion drawn from IRF2 that the 50% match funding requirement was too high for SMEs in genuine need of grant funding to pledge from the outset.

The second major change was to increase the maximum grant request from £20,000 to £30,000 to facilitate full spend of the larger total pot whilst still ensuring a good number of recipients. With six out of nine IRF2 recipients requesting the maximum amount, there was a clear demand for larger sums of grant funding. Just over 50% of IRF3 requests exceeded £20,000, with 25% applying for the full £30,000. This suggests both that the higher amount of funding presented a more attractive offer to prospective applicants and that businesses were looking to bring forward larger projects.

The final significant change was the removal of the pathway approach. To differentiate between UKSPF and REPF funding and encourage applications from certain types of projects, IRF2 invited business to apply under a 'Net Zero Innovation', 'Rural Productivity' or 'Farm Diversification' pathway. As only the 'Rural Productivity' pathway received a good number of eligible applications, this approach

was not effective at eliciting specific project proposals and added a layer of confusion and complexity for applicants. Removing the pathways made it easier to market the fund and convey simply the types of projects sought.

With all changes made simultaneously, the increased interest in IRF3 cannot be predominantly attributed to a single policy change, although the combined effect did lead to a higher number of applications. IRF3 attracted 91 Eols compared to 56 for IRF2, with a total of 38 eligible full bids submitted, almost double the 19 received for IRF2. The higher demand levels remain even when the larger total pot is accounted for, with £2.39 requested for every £1 available under IRF3 vs £1.62 under IRF2.

Applicants scored additional points if they fell into one of ten priority groups, categorised into sectors, places, people, and projects. This was designed to prioritise support towards both high growth sectors and modernising traditional industries, as well as supporting businesses facing the biggest barriers to growth. This included businesses operating from villages, hamlets, and the open countryside, and applicants with disabilities or aged between 18-30. The priority groups were drawn from the strategic aims outlined in the Investment Plan and the emerging Economic Development Strategy to target investment where it would have the greatest impact in achieving wider goals.

76% of applicants fell into a priority category, with the majority being either highly rural or food and drink businesses. Of those businesses awarded grants, 94% of them were in a priority group. There were several categories where no or few applications were received, including directors aged 18-30, applicants with disabilities, and businesses operating in either high tech engineering or sustainable transport and aviation. This suggests that the inclusion of priority groups had a limited effect on who applied for the fund, although they did influence who was successful, with a higher percentage of priority applicants receiving funding.

All eligible full bids were scored by two officers against a set of scoring criteria, who then discussed and moderated all applications to produce a final recommendation for the UKSPF Panel. 22 bids totalling £389,512 were recommended for either approval or conditional approval. During the UKSPF Panel discussion, councillors opted to approve 18 of these applications, leaving an underspend of £27,589, with members electing to reassign this to the Carbon Action Fund budget. The identical success rate (47%) in IRF2 and IRF3 demonstrates that the higher volume of applications did not equate to a higher quality in the applications submitted.

Once the successful applicants had been notified and the grant funding agreements signed, a 15-minute introductory conversation was held between each beneficiary and the project team. This was in response to feedback received in IRF1 that recipients saw value in meeting the team at the start as well as the end of the process to make the scheme more personable and present the opportunity for questions and queries upfront. The introductory calls were positively received and may be linked to the increased responsiveness to progress report requests to IRF3

beneficiaries compared to IRF2 recipients, reducing officer time spent monitoring the projects.

### **Outputs, Outcomes, and Impacts**

Twenty-seven businesses were awarded grants across the two rounds, exceeding the target set of twenty. The number of farm businesses receiving funding, and therefore the number of farm diversification projects supported, was lower than anticipated. As farms operate within a complex grant funding landscape and were only eligible to apply for diversification projects away from agriculture, attracting interest from this sector proved an ongoing challenge.

Whilst the 'number of jobs created' and 'number of jobs safeguarded' targets were exceeded, the remaining outcomes were lower than anticipated. This is likely due to the timing of reporting in relation to project completion dates. Although recipients had to spend all their grant funding by the end of March, not all projects had completed by that date, with businesses using their match funding to finish activity.

Furthermore, projects were not expected to have achieved all outputs and outcomes pledged in their application until the Impact Report stage; six months after project completion. As few IRF3 projects had reached this stage by the time of writing, the focus in this evaluation will be on the outputs and outcomes from IRF2.

Job creation can both result from initial project implementation and post-project business growth. This means that some businesses seek to hire new employees as soon as the grant is awarded to ensure they have the expertise and required staffing numbers to carry out their project, for example new operatives to work equipment purchased. In contrast, increased productivity levels and business growth can only be reported once the project has completed and the downstream impacts have time to develop.

The number of jobs created is measured in full time equivalent (FTE) roles, so although more than 19 opportunities were created, a high proportion of these were part time. The majority of jobs created in IRF2 came from two businesses who employed large numbers of part time staff in the tourism and hospitality industry, with far fewer high value employment opportunities created. The high number of jobs created meant the average cost per job for IRF2 was just £9,189, a significant reduction on the IRF1 average of £19k, demonstrating a good cost to benefit ratio.

The stated aim of IRF was to create high value jobs; defined as full time, skilled roles with a salary of or above the district average. Whilst the numerical targets around job creation were exceeded, IRF2 was less successful in generating the types of jobs desired. The application form requires applicants to outline not only the number of forecast jobs but the job title and salary, so those projects pledging high value jobs are scored more highly during the appraisal process. Although this increases the likelihood that projects creating high value jobs will receive funding, achieving this aim is dependent on businesses submitting projects with this outcome.

With only 13 out of 27 projects from both rounds completed by the end of March 2025, only 50% could report back on the impact of the project on their business in time for the report submission to MHCLG. As the timing of final reports was not factored into the production of target numbers, they forecast the total impacts achieved by projects, rather than the number anticipated by the end of March 2025. It is likely that ongoing monitoring of IRF2 and IRF3 projects will show these outcomes resulting from the funding awarded, albeit outside of the original UKSPF timeline.

Measuring these outcomes also proved a challenge as they relied on grant recipients being able to accurately report back the impact of their projects. In the application form, productivity was measured in net profit per worker, with applicants asked to calculate their current productivity and the percentage difference expected to result from the project. When asked to report final productivity increases, recipients strayed from this methodology and instead counted higher volumes of production or time efficiencies as evidenced of improved productivity. This was partly due to a lack of knowledge amongst beneficiaries in how to calculate productivity increases, with officers needing to provide additional guidance to ensure proper completion of the final report.

Timing also played a factor, with annual accounts produced midway through the project cycle. This meant that the financial uplift resulting from the project was not fully reflected in that year's accounts, with a full year post-project required to understand the true impact on a business' finances. Furthermore, by using net profit rather than EBITDA data, additional salary costs or changes in taxation can show a reduction in productivity, even where turnover has increased as a result of the project.

Uncertainty in how to report productivity increases or the absence of appropriate data to convey impact can result in the substitution of alternative metrics. Whilst this can be ameliorated with the provision of further guidance, in the absence of longer-term reporting schedules the precise impact of projects cannot be gleaned from recipients.

The 'number of businesses experiencing growth' was introduced as a new indicator for REPF, meaning 'growth' was never defined by MHCLG. There are numerous ways to measure business growth, such as increased revenue, market expansion, or additional customer numbers. A maximalist approach was taken, with businesses reporting any of these benefits counted under this metric. However, this meant that the scale of growth and type of growth was inconsistent across businesses supported, lessening the utility of the outcome in accessing the grant's benefit to recipients.

The impact of IRF on the local economy went beyond just the businesses funded. Over £84k from IRF2 projects was spent within East Devon, equating to 56% of the total amount of IRF2 funding allocated. Spend within the district currently stands at

£110k for IRF3, or 38% of the total grants awarded, with 59% of the total project costs spent. This demonstrates that there was a broader economic benefit to the initial investment in local businesses.

Although local procurement was incentivised through the scoring matrix, only £17k was pledged across all IRF2 applications. This suggests that businesses were independently motivated to select local suppliers and sought to do this regardless of the grant policy. The variation can be largely attributed to a single project which did not indicate any preferred suppliers in their application but accounted for 55% of all local spend. The remaining recipients did end up spending more locally than expected, mostly due to the use of local tradespeople and contractors to carry out additional works not mentioned in the application form.

Submission of a Completion Report 6-months on from the project end enabled recipients to report back on additional impacts beyond the outputs and outcomes achieved. Questions asked included the impact on the financial health of the business, social benefits such as opportunities for disadvantaged individuals, and reduced carbon emissions. Whilst most beneficiaries were able to detail the financial benefits experienced, few recipients reported either social or environmental benefits.

Quantifying these benefits proved a challenge, as the free text boxes used in the report meant recipients either used different metrics to assess impact or didn't include figures in their responses. For example, in response to 'has the project enabled the business to grow?', where recipients were asked to refer to increased turnover and/or increased user numbers, some merely wrote that turnover had increased, others outlined how much turnover had increased in pounds, whilst others provided a percentage increase.

Although this demonstrated that the project had a positive impact on the business' finances, it made it hard to determine both the scale of the impact and draw any comparison between projects. Amendments were made to the final report template for IRF3, with recipients asked more specific questions on how their turnover, customer numbers, and product sales had increased since the project was implemented.

Businesses also reported back their progress on project specific targets, which are not easily comparable across projects. For example, an apple producer was able to reuse a waste product from the juice production process as a fertiliser, reducing the amount of fertiliser by 20%, whilst a caterer was able to cater large venues, opening up a wider list of potential clientele.

Feedback presented by beneficiaries was uniformly positive, with recipients reporting that the process was 'straightforward' and 'communicated effectively'. This suggests that the scheme was made as accessible as possible to businesses, with the necessary support provided by the project team. Of the IRF3 recipients, 72% had not previously received a grant from EDDC, showing that news of the scheme was able

to reach new businesses and that the scheme design was sufficiently easy enough to navigate to entice new applicants.

## Evaluation Summary

Key Question	Response
1. Was the project effective?	The project was largely effective at dispersing grant funding to the local business community, with the changes made between IRF2 and 3 having a positive impact in increasing application numbers. The funded projects were able to demonstrate good improvements in productivity and job creation, although the creation of high value employment opportunities proved a challenge.
2. Was the process of implementation efficient?	IRF3 was mobilised quickly, with the existing processes in place enabling the scheme to go live as early as possible. There was a quick turnaround, with grants paid out less than three months from the launch date.
3. Did the project provide good value for money?	The cost per job for IRF2 was lower than IRF1, suggesting better value for money on the outputs created. However, it is more challenging to measure the cost to benefit ratio for other outputs and outcomes generated, making it hard to determine the real economic impact of the scheme.
4. Did the project provide additionality?	IRF remained the only targeted, localised capital grants scheme available to businesses in East Devon.
5. Did the project align with the strategic ambitions set out in the UKSPF Investment Plan?	The mandated outputs and outcomes of improved productivity and high value jobs creation ensures that all projects funded work towards the two strategic aims of the IRF scheme. However, the ambition to support a smaller number of more innovative projects, particularly those contributing towards net zero, has not been realised.

## Lessons Learnt

- Greater detail is required in defining outputs and outcomes to applicants, with a clear and accessible methodology presented as to how each output should be measured.
- Questions asked in the final report should be more specific on the metrics used and guide recipients to provide comparable information on the impacts of their project.
- A more personable approach to project monitoring, including introductory meetings with beneficiaries, can reduce officer time spent following up on progress report requests.
- A 30% match requirement is a reasonable request of applicants to ensure private investment is leveraged whilst keeping the fund accessible to SMEs.

- When deciding upon the total grant pot for future iterations of the IRF, officers should be guided by the total grant request from applications recommended for approval in previous rounds to create parity between the grant request from high quality projects and the total grant sum available.
- Additional incentives are needed to continue to attract new applicants, such as wider marketing, and to prioritise new applicants over returning recipients.
- Target outputs and outcomes should be set with the reporting time frame in mind, with only those forecast to be achieved in the monitoring period included.

## Leisure Programme Year 3 Evaluation

<b>Project Lead</b>	Andrew Dare (LED)
<b>Intervention</b>	E10: Funding for local sports facilities, tournaments, teams and leagues to bring people together
<b>Total Allocation</b>	£114,000
<b>Year 3 Allocation</b>	£38,000
<b>Year 3 Spend</b>	£38,000

<b>Output</b>	<b>Target (across 3 years)</b>	<b>Achieved (across 3 years)</b>
Number of events/participatory programmes	7	20
Number of volunteering opportunities supported	8	18
<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Target (across 3 years)</b>	<b>Achieved (across 3 years)</b>
Improved perception of facilities/amenities	750	929
Increased users of facilities/amenities	450	19,605

### Background

East Devon's Leisure Programme ran for all three years of UKSPF under the delivery model outlined in the initial contract signed with LED, with 2024/25 (Year 3) activity building on the work done in previous years.

As in 2022-2024, LED's Outreach Team were funded to design and deliver a range of activities to engage more residents in physical activity. The Leisure Programme takes a holistic approach to health, with mental wellbeing, tackling social isolation, and creating a balanced lifestyle being as important as physical fitness. This links to the second core objective of East Devon's [Leisure Strategy](#) to complement Outreach Health and Wellbeing.

### Activities

Year 3 saw both the commencement of new activities and continuation of initiatives started in previous years. This combination enabled the team to carry on delivery of popular provisions and capitalise on investment in equipment whilst exploring opportunities to trial a more diverse offering.

Evidence from the Leisure Strategy emphasised the need to cater to the ageing population of East Devon (with 30% of residents over 65 at the time of its publication) and to engage more children in physical activity as data indicated they had lower activity rates than both Devon and England averages. This focus was

demonstrated in the first two years of the programme, with most projects targeted at either school children or over 65s.

However, Year 3 saw an increase in the number of activities designed to appeal to young adults and working age residents. First outlined in the Investment Plan and later adopted as a core element of East Devon's Economic Development Strategy, cultivating an attractive lifestyle offer is an important mechanism for encouraging working age people to remain in or move to the district. Developing a strong leisure provision which appealed to younger people was highlighted in the Investment Plan as a key opportunity for strengthening this offer. Both LED membership and the communities they serve have an older population, meaning that activities have traditionally been designed to cater to those age groups. Over the course of delivery, in conversation with EDDC officers, the activities designed were brought into greater alignment with the Investment Plan objectives with resources channelled into creating a targeted offer for younger residents. The additional funding provided through UKSPF created capacity to trial programmes suitable for a younger demographic on a smaller scale and gauge uptake from that cohort without alienating their core client base.

New activities aimed at younger residents in Year 3 included Live to Row, Strength Training, Hyrox, and Junior Triathlons. The Live to Row programme, developed in partnership with a local physiotherapist, was a fitness class designed for working mothers returning to exercise. Whilst the focus was on rowing, the class also included core and pelvic floor work to strength muscles involved in postpartum recovery.

Hyrox, an intensive workout competition where participants' strength, power, and endurance are tested was introduced at the Hangar in Axminster. Originating in Germany, Hyrox has become popular worldwide, with enthusiasts training locally for international competitions. Whilst open to any age group, the intention of the programme was to attract younger adults to the centre who are keen to participate in the latest fitness trends and join the international community.

It was important to maintain a balance in the activities delivered and ensure those targeted at younger age groups were still open and accessible to all. In previous marketing, LED has specified which demographics could attend certain programmes, which led to a negative response from those who felt excluded, so this approach was not taken for the UKSPF projects. Additionally, activities targeting schoolchildren and elderly residents were both originated and continued in Year 3. This included Strength and Balance, a class for those who have recently has a fall or feel unsteady on their feet, a Stroke Wellness Hub for those recovering from a stroke, and delivery of Pickleball and Rowing in schools.

Demographics data is available for some activities included in the programme. Whilst Pickleball attracted individuals from all age ranges, 84% of players were in the 50-75 age range, with only 5% falling into the young adult age range. In comparison, 48%

of Hyrox participants were young adults and 82% were under 50. This suggests that the inclusion of new activities was successful in attracting a different demographic, whilst catering to the core user base of the centres.

By Year 3, the team had a strong understanding of where demand lay and the activities and marketing most likely to attract uptake. This meant that participation rates were high across all programmes delivered and there was little need to adjust or cancel proposed activities.

The cost of delivery for each activity was dependent on the level of equipment required and whether external and specialist support was needed to design and lead each activity. This created significant variation between activities, with setting up Junior Pickleball costing just £150 whilst £3,500 was needed to implement the Live to Row programme. There was also a big difference in the participation numbers for each activity, which was largely related to how specialised the offering was. For example, the Stroke Wellness Hub was only suitable for stroke survivors, whereas Pickleball is open to all ages and fitness levels.

The variation in cost and participation for each activity had a knock-on impact on the cost per participant. It cost only £0.04 per person to run the virtual group exercises, but £20 for each participant in the Battle Cancer Programme. This enabled the low-cost activities to offset those which were more expensive and meant that many activities could be offered at a free or subsidised cost. Of the 16 activities delivered, only 4 (25%) cost more to run than they would've generated from charging the attendance fee. However, as six were offered free of charge, five were offered at a subsidised rate, and a further three were included in the membership offer, they did not generate the same income had all participants been charged the non-membership rate to attend.

This meant only two of the activities delivered were revenue generating for LED, and therefore public funding was required to make the overall programme viable. Although the programme could've be run on a different financial model, this would have undermined its ethos and put up additional barriers to residents participating in physical activity. EDDC's Leisure Strategy makes clear that provision of leisure facilities is a core council function, and that this must be inclusive and accessible to all residents, regardless of income levels.

Offering activities at free or subsidised rates was especially important where there was a social prescribing element, where healthcare providers refer patients to community facilities as part of their treatment plan. In these cases, for example Strength and Balance and Battle Cancer, the activities serve an important function as part of the broader healthcare system, so it is crucial that income doesn't restrict individual's ability to access these services.

Overall, the Leisure Programme demonstrated good value for money compared to the number of users who benefitted from the provision. Despite the variation in costs

involved, the total funding for the programme worked out to just £1.39 for each participant, which is a minimal sum compared to the benefits of engagement in exercise and leisure activities.

### **Outputs, Outcomes, and Impacts**

The Leisure Programme had already met most of its output and outcome targets by the end of Year 2, so it easily exceeded these numbers in Year 3 to result in a significant overachievement. As LED obtains participant information through a sign-up form, it was able to count the number of participants, identify new users, and get further information on the demographics of users. Additionally, they have a survey system in place, incentivised via free vouchers, which also assisted in securing the necessary data for reporting.

One challenge experienced in monitoring the outputs and outcomes was the broad nature of the indicators selected. Unlike programmes such as tourism, there are no outputs designed specifically to monitor leisure-related projects. This means that the indicators provide a strong understanding of overall engagement with the programme and the perceptions of users but lack more precise details on how it impacted beneficiaries with regard to their health and wellbeing.

Although it is clear that the programme was effective at increasing participation in leisure activities and reaching a variety of different demographics, it is not possible from the available data to ascertain its impact against all of its strategic aims. One key rationale of the project was to improve health and wellbeing via leisure activities, but there is no programme wide information gathered on the longer-term health outcomes of participants. The high number of participants, coupled with the vast range of factors contributing to an individual's health, makes it nearly impossible to know both the health of all participants before and after the intervention and to attribute any improvements to the programme.

Secondly, there is limited information available on how many participants continued to engage in leisure activities, physical exercise, or altered their lifestyle as a result of support. The only indication of ongoing participation is the number of people who signed-up for an LED membership after trialling an activity, which stood at 498 for Year 3. Although this is only a fraction of overall participants, LED tracking data could not identify distinct individuals, meaning those who repeatedly engaged were counted multiple times. For example, the 10,000 participants in Group Exercise Virtual Classes are not 10,000 individuals, as anyone taking multiple classes would be counted for every class they attended. Therefore, the number of sign-ups as a percentage of distinct users is unknown and cannot be used as a metric of success.

Additional survey work is required to fully evaluate the impact of the Leisure Programme against all strategic aims. This would need to include pre- and post-participation surveys of participants to measure change and whether any changes continued longer term. Implementing this level of monitoring would present

challenges due to the large cohort and difficulties in obtaining responses to surveys, however, in its absence, many potential benefits of the programme remain unknown.

Case studies from Live to Row and Pickleball provide some additional insight into the wider impacts on beneficiaries. A common theme cited in participant feedback is the social benefits realised through participation in group exercise and competitive sports. For example, one Pickleball player introduced her family to the sport and they now play together regularly. Testimonials from Live to Row members describe the activity as ‘fun, friendly, and sociable’ and mention making friends and finding community with other participants. Although this feedback is from a limited number of participants, it demonstrates that positive impacts are being realised beyond what is captured in output reporting.

### Evaluation Summary

Key Question	Response
1. Was the project effective?	Yes. The project overachieved on all outputs and outcomes and was able to engage a significant number of residents in new leisure activities. The project evidenced wider wellbeing benefits including community development and targeted support for health conditions.
2. Was the process of implementation efficient?	Yes. The activities planned were mobilised and fully delivered within the time frame required. Continuing activities were smoothly rolled over for a further year and new activities were quickly implemented so participants could be recorded within the financial year.
3. Did the project provide good value for money?	Yes. The overall cost per participant was minimal and was low for the number of outputs and outcomes achieved. Ongoing activities such as Pickleball, InBody, and Strength and Balance required smaller financial investments each year despite higher user numbers, showing a clear return on investment.
4. Did the project provide additionality?	Yes. The programme enabled LED to expand their core offering and deliver outside of the centres to attract new users and develop more accessible programmes.
5. Did the project align with the strategic ambitions set out in the UKSPF Investment Plan?	The project was able to demonstrate some alignment with the strategic aims, including engaging a younger audience and widening participation in leisure activities. However, limitations on the participant data available makes it impossible to evidence that all strategic ambitions were achieved.

## Lessons Learnt

- Broader key performance indicators beyond UKSPF outputs and outcomes are required where strategic aims and forecast benefits do not align with MHCLG indicators.
- Further survey work is required to ascertain the benefit to participant's overall health and wellbeing and their ongoing participation in physical exercise and leisure activities
- All information required for monitoring of wider benefits should be considered at the project design stage to ensure progress reports capture the data needed for robust evaluation.
- Accurate calculation of increased user numbers requires more advanced monitoring, including collecting identifying data and removing duplicates, to ensure individuals are not double counted. Shared understanding of how participants are counted and what submitted figures represent should be established in the project design stage.

## Retrofit Programme Year 3 Evaluation

<b>Project Lead</b>	Zoë Smith
<b>Intervention</b>	E39: Green skills courses
<b>Total Allocation</b>	£135,968
<b>Year 3 Allocation</b>	£135,968
<b>Year 3 Spend</b>	£135,968

<b>Output</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Achieved</b>
Number of people supported to gain a qualification	150	136
Number of people in employment engaging with the skills system	78	89
Number of people supported to participate in education	500	967
Number of people attending training sessions	150	139
<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Achieved</b>
People gaining a qualification or completing a course following support	75	136
Number of people in education/training following support	75	24

### Background

The UKSPF Investment Plan originally set out three different programmes/activities which fit under the 'People and Skills' theme. The government confirmed that UKSPF funding could only be allocated to P&S activity in Year 3 of the programme (2024/25), as other legacy EU funded programmes were still operating in the previous two financial years. As a result, P&S activity set out in the Investment Plan was intentionally broad and high-level, allowing for flexibility later in the programme.

When developing the Investment Plan, Devon County Council, who typically lead on skills and employability-based work in the local area, approached district councils to help identify local need and advise on where funding might be best directed. One of those activities was the continuation of a retrofit skills programme. Research indicated a significant gap in skills to prepare for future retrofitting demand, with average wages for retrofitters above both the district and national averages.

The original ambition of the UKSPF funded programme was to build on the Retrofit Skills and Business Accelerator, previously funded through the Community Renewal Fund (CRF), a precursor to the UKSPF. This programme focused on the delivery of retrofit assessor and retrofit co-ordinator accreditations, with training provided by the Retrofit Academy.

As the CRF funded programme concluded delivery in 2022, there was no opportunity to augment/extend this for 2024/25, necessitating the design and implementation of a new scheme. Evaluation conducted on the CRF programme and conversations

with partners involved suggested that the continuation of the Retrofit Academy provision would not be the optimal way forward. After considerable research and review, officers began exploring alternative options.

Officers approached Exeter College as they were developing a series of retrofit courses based on evidenced need obtained from the Green Skills Advisory Panel (GSAP) and were the only local provider. A proposal was put forward by Exeter College to deliver a broad range of retrofit courses and a schools engagement programme. The course catalogue included training to upskill existing tradespeople to become certified installers, introductory courses to provide the foundational knowledge for a career in retrofitting, and training on heat pumps and solar installation. There was also a 'Train the Trainer' programme to increase capacity to deliver the programme and ensure a sufficient supply of educators for future cohorts.

The schools programme would target secondary school children to encourage them to choose retrofitting and green skills as career pathways. This was to include delivery days embedded within the curriculum for Geography GCSE, an innovation competition, and engagement with employers to provide careers advice.

The programme was developed with a focus on the key challenges facing retrofit skills delivery, including the lack of take-up by students and insufficient staff numbers to teach courses. With only a year of spend, these additions aimed to establish a legacy beyond 2025.

To ensure a clear and effective link between funding and skills provision, a partnership arrangement was sought with Exeter College to deliver the programme. Once a funding agreement was reached between the council and Exeter College, an initial tranche of funding was paid to start the provision.

## **Activities**

Initial activity was focused on coordinating the course dates and delivery methods. The first courses to go online were the awareness courses which had dates and bookings open for August through to November 2024. These were mainly targeted at householders looking to make their homes more energy efficient and trade professionals interested in diversifying into retrofit. In early 2025, the attendees had predominantly been retired homeowners with interest in undertaking their own retrofitting projects, but new promotional activities and more targeted courses were intended to change this for future cohorts.

The Level 2 retrofit and damp and mould courses opened later, with one online course accessible anytime via self-learning and the other aiming for in-person delivery in October and November. All courses were being trialled until November, so that courses delivered between January and March could be tweaked based on take-up and participant feedback. Insulation courses could not go live in October or

November as the room for the training needed fitting out, therefore requiring a later go-live.

Exeter College worked with East Devon secondary schools to deliver green skills workshops to their GCSE students. Engagement with schools had also proved more difficult than anticipated. It was hoped that all secondary schools in East Devon would participate in the programme, however some were difficult to engage with. Ultimately, all schools in East Devon engaged with the programme, but to significantly varying degrees. This included: Cranbrook, Honiton, Sidmouth, Kings, Clyst Vale, Colyton, Exmouth and Axe Valley.

### Outputs, Outcomes, and Impacts

The table below shows the indicative target for each type of support on offer and the number of learners/beneficiaries who completed a course. The 'deliverable capacity' figure shows how many learners could have been trained if each available training place had been taken for every course advertised, although it was not expected that each course would reach full capacity.

Course	Indicative Target	Deliverable Capacity	Beneficiaries
Intro to Retrofit	24	168	24
Intro to Heat Pumps	18	144	61
Intro to Solar	18	108	20
Green Skills CAVA	6	6	3
L2 Damp and Mould	24	N/A	4
L2 Retrofit	24	72	18
L3 Teaching	6	12	6
External Wall Insulation	12	N/A	0
Internal Wall Insulation	12	N/A	0
Loft Insulation	18	N/A	0
Floor	18	N/A	0
Draft Proofing	18	N/A	0

A total of 136 people were supported to gain a qualification following support, with 24 of them going onto receive further education or training. The Introduction to Heat Pumps course experienced the highest level of demand from across all beneficiary types and postcodes, with 42% of spaces filled and the indicative target being significantly exceeded. Only 14% of available spaces for the Introduction to Retrofit courses were taken, and 18.5% for Introduction for Solar, indicating much lower demand, even though these figures aligned well with indicative targets.

It should be noted that courses for insulation, flooring, draft proofing, etc. did not run due to a lack of demand for the other courses trialled and the risk of duplicating

courses delivered by Exeter College under the UK Government's Skills Bootcamps initiative.

<b>Town</b>	<b>Beneficiaries</b>
Exmouth	34
Honiton	30
Sidmouth	15
Cranbrook	21
Budleigh	11
Seaton	7
Axminster	2
Ottery	6

Although Exmouth saw the highest number of beneficiaries, Cranbrook had the highest number of beneficiaries as a percentage of its population, followed by Honiton. This could be linked to the close proximity and accessibility to the Future Skills Centre, where many of the courses were delivered. For the self-employed, interest was split between heat pumps and solar. Although some unemployed and self-employed beneficiaries took up L2 Retrofit courses, the majority of take-up came from those already in employment. All L3 beneficiaries were employed. Retirees only took up introductory courses, which made sense given their interest was mostly in identifying ways to improve their home energy efficiency.

<b>Employment Status</b>	<b>Beneficiaries</b>
Employed	65
Unemployed	17
Self-employed	21
Retired	23
FT Education/Training	10

One of the main challenges was participants booking on to courses but not attending on the day, with almost double the number of people signing up as attending. In one instance, a course had 12 bookings, with only 2 people actually showing up. This made it a challenge to respond to demand and cancel or reschedule sessions, as the sign-ups indicated attendance was sufficient to proceed as planned. It was hoped that as awareness and demand increases, courses could be overbooked, meaning a reduced impact to last minute no-shows. Given low demand throughout, overbooking never became a likely prospect and so the issue remained largely unresolved. Across the board, an average of 53% of cohorts were delivered compared to what was advertised, and only 29% of learners attended compared to deliverable capacity.

As the main expenses for the courses need to be paid for in advance, courses needed to be cancelled well in advance to prevent costs from being incurred. Some

future courses were cancelled, but this still did not address low attendance compared to reasonable sign-ups. Sign up fees were suggested as a potential mitigation, but the College did not adopt this.

With uptake lower than hoped throughout the programme, a strong focus was placed on marketing the courses through paid ads and newspapers. For example, beyond usual digital marketing, a leaflet had been created to drop to key business parks and community centres in East Devon to advertise the courses. This in itself did not lead to a significant increase in demand. However, targeted approaches, such as presenting an offer to a particular employer did work better, as they enrolled a full cohort of staff. As some employers did not follow through on the offers presented, this was very much an 'all or nothing' approach to increasing participation. In many instances, there was mismatch between what employers said they wanted and what they subsequently signed up for. Many expressed an interest in having employees undertake these courses and identified a need for these skills, but when asked to commit to particular dates/hours out of work, this initial interest did not manifest in action.

There was some flexibility to move the budget between different courses depending on take up and demand, however this still relied on demand for some courses exceeding expectations. It was also important to maintain the quality of courses being delivered and to a corresponding qualification level.

Another challenge was the lack of interest in the 'Train the Trainer' qualification from East Devon residents. This was always targeted at a small cohort, with six individuals trained under the initial L3 Teaching course and three trainers qualified under the more advanced Green Skills CAVA qualification against a target of six. All of the three individuals came from within the industry, either through GSAP or Building Greater Exeter (BGEX). To help increase demand, Exeter College reached out to their teacher database to find potential candidates from East Devon. One of the three individuals taught was a tutor in construction with green skills embedded in the course, whilst the remaining two were supporting delivery of masterclasses through the College's range of green skills courses, such as the Skills Bootcamps for example.

For the schools programme, the workshops demonstrated to students the types of careers available in retrofit and energy efficiency, and the pathways they need to take to work in those sectors. Although measuring outputs for this activity was straightforward, measuring longer term impact is very challenging. There is no way of measuring whether any of these students would go onto take up a career in this sector. There is a qualitative impact, in removing social stigmas around the trades and demonstrating that retrofit is an emerging and exciting sector to work in. These perceptions, in time, can help to influence decisions on career choices.

## Value for Money

A total of £103,794 was assigned to direct course delivery, with £12,733 for marketing and £19,440 for the schools programme. With 136 people gaining a qualification or completing a course following support, this comes to an average of £763 per beneficiary, rising to £857 if marketing costs are factored in. Although similar courses can be procured from other organisations for cheaper, it is not clear whether such providers can offer a like-for-like service compared to the college.

It should be noted that although the number of beneficiaries was low compared to deliverable capacity, in many instances beneficiary numbers did align closely with the indicative target, exceeding it in some instances. If value for money is measured according to what is expected rather than maximum capacity, it could be reasonable to state that acceptable value for money was achieved.

Given the ongoing challenges of recruiting and maintaining a stock of local trainers, the programme would have helped to support these individuals, many of whom may have taken a pay cut to teach rather than carry out their trades. Although it was not the ambition of the programme to subsidise local trainers, ensuring a consistent work programme for these individuals is key to help maintain a steady stream of new learners coming into the industry.

Alternative approaches could have been utilised, where training providers or employers request funding from the council for a particular course, for example. This approach may have achieved better value for money, but this would have significantly increased the risk of programme-wide underspend, and would perhaps work better in situations where multi-year funding is provided. This approach is also unlikely to prevent a situation where higher sign-ups fail to translate to the equivalent turnout on the day. Given the ongoing national challenge of building a skilled retrofit workforce, low take-up at the local level is neither unexpected nor atypical.

It is not clear what longer-term impact the training has had on the beneficiaries receiving support. For example, the College does not monitor whether beneficiaries went on to gain new employment opportunities, either within or outside of the retrofit sector. This makes it difficult to confirm whether good value for money was achieved from an employment perspective.

For the schools programme, a total of 967 students were engaged, coming to a cost of around £20 per student. Initial research shows that similar provisions are likely to incur a similar cost, so it can be assumed that a reasonable value for money was achieved here.

## Evaluation Summary

Key Question	Response
1. Was the project effective?	Yes, the project was effective at offering and delivering retrofit courses and school workshops. Delivery matched, and in many instances exceeded, indicative targets, even with take-up being lower than the college's capacity.
2. Was the process of implementation efficient?	Yes, a relatively straightforward mechanism was applied, with a funding agreement between the council and college allowing for a quick gear-up.
3. Did the project provide good value for money?	In some instances good value for money was achieved, but the low level of take-up meant that training sessions were more costly per person.
4. Did the project provide additionality?	Yes, there were no other free courses nor similar schools workshops on offer in the local area. Where the risk of duplication did present itself, the programme steered back towards courses offering genuine additionality.
5. Did the project align with the strategic ambitions set out in the UKSPF Investment Plan?	Yes, the provision of retrofit courses and the schools programme aligned with the Investment Plan, which specifically outlined retrofit skills as a strategic priority and opportunity.

## Lessons Learnt

- Dealing with low take-up is a very difficult challenge to resolve, especially when courses are being delivered for free to address market failure in a particular sector. A clear financial incentive or government imperative is required to encourage those already in work to invest the time in upskilling or reskilling.
- Closing skills gaps requires targeted investment throughout the pipeline, which cannot be achieved through a single programme and requires partnership working over a sustained timeframe.
- A single year delivery period for pilot initiatives is insufficient to raise awareness, test demand levels, and revise models to optimise take-up. Having realistic indicative targets is important when comparing against deliverable capacity, helping to manage expectations and create a baseline value for money threshold.
- Measuring longer term impact from schools programmes is very challenging, with outcomes almost impossible to measure, especially when activity is based around removing social stigmas.
- Specialist skills programmes may function more effectively on a larger geographical scale where a larger target market can help ameliorate issues regarding low take-up. Also, a smaller provision with a narrower target audience may assist in marketing efforts as a singular, simpler message can be advertised to a specific audience.

## Sustainable Tourism Programme Year 3 Evaluation

<b>Project Lead:</b>	Geri Panteva
<b>Intervention:</b>	E17: Funding for the development and promotion of the visitor economy
<b>Original Total Budget:</b>	£229,425 <sup>1</sup>
<b>Year 3 Budget:</b>	£130,000
<b>Year 3 Spend:</b>	£130,000

<b>Output</b>	<b>Target (across 3 years)</b>	<b>Achieved (across 3 years)</b>
Number of local events or activities supported	30	96
Number of Tourism, Culture or Heritage assets created or improved	10	11
Number of enterprises receiving grants	22	15
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	35	139
Number of people reached	10,000	20,859
<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Target (across 3 years)</b>	<b>Achieved (across 3 years)</b>
Increase in visitor spending	£2,500	£3,203
Increased amount of investment	£85,000	£159,360
Improved perception of attractions	10	21
Increased visitor numbers	200	1,900
Estimated Carbon dioxide equivalent reductions as a result of support	4	34

### Background

The Sustainable Tourism Programme (STP) ran across all three years of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, with the allocation dispersed across several smaller initiatives. The Investment Plan proposal for the STP focused on two key activities: a small grants scheme for tourism businesses and the potential continuation of a pilot project run by Sidmouth Town Council. However, as the pilot came to an end without a clear route to expand the project, alternative proposals were required to utilise the budget. This is covered in further detail in the Year 2 evaluation.

Publication of East Devon's Tourism Strategy in 2022 provided a roadmap for designing and implementing new initiatives to support the sector and became the key strategic document around which activity was orientated. Updated proposals for

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<sup>1</sup> This figure includes c£125k distributed as decarbonisation funding through the CLTF and CAF. Evaluation of that spend is contained within the CLTF and CAF evaluations, however the funding is listed here as there are outputs and outcomes reported relating to grant funding issued.

Year 3 were approved by the UKSPF Panel in February 2024, including £60,000 for the decarbonisation grants awarded under the Carbon Action Fund.

Year 3 delivery involved both the continuation of activities, such as the East Devon Tourism Network (EDTN) and an ongoing contribution to the Taste East Devon (TED) food festival, and new projects like the creation of the East Devon Cultural Tourism Map. The budget was also used to support the delivery of two PR campaigns and to provide additional funding to a wider beach accessibility project being delivered by EDDC.

## **Activities**

Delivery of the East Devon Tourism Network continued as planned, with [East Devon Excellence](#) (EDE) managing the network and coordinating the four annual events. The first event of 2024/25, 'The Art of Working Together', was held at Raceworld and focused on collaboration. Speakers included the Devon and Partners Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) and Exeter College and centred on developing private/public sector partnerships within the tourism sector.

This was followed by 'Switch on the Off-Season' which took place on board a Stuart Line Cruise Ship in early October. Talks given focused on success stories and strategies for attracting visitors out of peak season, with an emphasis on promoting the natural landscape of the area. A drop-in clinic was piloted at this event, with attendees invited to approach the EDTN Team for tailored advice on how to grow their business, forge connections, and market their offer more effectively. This was trialled to provide more direct support to members and promote deeper levels of engagement, but with only two attendees taking up this offer, it was not continued for future events.

'Taking Centre Stage', was held at Jurassic Discovery in Seaton and focused on cultural tourism, with the event timed to the launch of East Devon's Cultural Tourism Map. The final EDTN event of the year was held at the UK's first net zero hotel - the Voco Zeal - which opened at the Exeter Science Park in March 2025. The theme was the 'Impact of Innovation', with a tour of the hotel demonstrating all the measures considered and implemented to create carbon neutral accommodation.

With around 60 attendees coming to each event held against a target of 50, attendance levels remained strong throughout the year. This suggests that the topics covered were of interest to local businesses and that the time and location was suitable for prospective attendees. A survey showed that EDTN members had attended 5 network events on average, with the high levels of repeat attendance demonstrating that members saw the events as a valuable use of their time.

The end of UKSPF funding put the long-term sustainability of the EDTN at risk. The proposed exit strategy in the initial project design was to transition over time to a paid membership model, with public funding reducing incrementally. At the current

membership level and network running costs, each member would need to pay around £147 per year to make it sustainable. As discussed later in the evaluation, evidence suggests this exceeds the amount members are willing or able to pay, which means ongoing public investment will be required post-UKSPF.

Sponsorship of the Taste East Devon (TED) festival continued, with a £5,000 grant awarded to cover promotion and marketing costs. In 2024, 42 events were held across nine days in September, with seven businesses receiving support from the festival organisers to host a new event. The festival is well aligned with the Tourism Strategy, linking to East Devon's identified strength as a foodie destination and the ambition to support tourism and hospitality businesses outside of peak season.

A small amount of funding went to Program Agency to coordinate a PR piece around three festivals all taking place in September: TED, the Sidmouth and East Devon Walking Festival, and the Budleigh Salterton Literary Festival. The materials drafted were sent to over 1,000 outlets, comprising both national and regional media contacts, resulting in 12 pieces of media coverage. The majority of the media coverage secured was for a Devon and South West audience, with some national media outlets contacted commenting that the appeal of the events was likely to be limited to a more regional audience. This feedback points to a significant challenge in attracting media interest from further afield for events held in East Devon.

£20,000 of capital funding went towards improving the accessibility of EDDC's beaches. As part of StreetScene's Beach Access Project, track matting has been laid in Seaton, Beer, Budleigh, and Sidmouth, making them possible to navigate for people with mobility impairments or pushchairs, facilitating visits from families and groups where a member of the party has a disability. The STP contribution went towards an additional 200m of track matting on the east end of Seaton beach and to part fund 120m of matting in front of the Lime Kiln car park in Budleigh.

The project aims to install matting across the district, with a focus on key routes from car parks covered and ensuring good coverage across longer beaches. Although there was some internal funding available, it was insufficient to bring all sites forward in quick succession, so the provision of UKSPF funding enabled track matting to be installed several years earlier than planned. There was a clear cost benefit to bringing forward the implementation timeframe as the matting increases in price each year and it was more efficient to lay the longer length of track in one installation.

The Beach Access Project demonstrated strong alignment with both the Tourism Strategy and Investment Plan ambition to ensure the tourism offer in the district has a strong focus on accessibility and inclusivity. The use of UKSPF funding to accelerate delivery timelines on an existing council project is a great example of cross-team working to achieve shared goals, with operational efficiencies and cost savings achieved through collaboration.

November 2024 saw the launch of the East Devon [Cultural Tourism Map](#), a map highlighting the key cultural assets and experiences on offer in the district. Growing cultural tourism is highlighted in both the Tourism and Culture strategies as a key opportunity to support local assets, raise visitor spend, and attract visitors year-round. Developed using officer time from the Cultural Producer and Senior Economic Development Officer, it was designed to showcase cultural assets in the area, from galleries and museums to festivals and vineyards. 40,000 copies of the map were printed and placed across the South West to both attract potential tourists and encourage visitors already in the area to explore more widely.

The budget for the Cultural Tourism Map went to its graphic design, printing, and promotion, with most of the work involved in creating the map carried out by officers. This involved concept design, stakeholder engagement, and coordinating all partners featured on the map. There was a high degree of interest in being featured, with fifty-six venues and experiences listed on the final copy of the map. Using internal resources to create the map both reduced costs and made best use of the local knowledge and existing relationships with partners, both to compile entries on the map and find appropriate places to distribute printed copies.

Of the 40,000 copies printed, 10,000 were distributed across the South West by Glide Media, who monitored stock and ensured leaflet holders were refilled once all maps were taken. The majority of the 47 locations were in Devon, but outlets as far as Bristol stocked copies, and 10 attractions across Somerset were included on the distribution list. Although most maps were placed at tourist, leisure, and cultural attractions, 19% were displayed in supermarkets and shops to capture a range of audiences. The remaining leaflets went to those featured on the map, local accommodation providers, and tourist information centres, with stock held by EDDC to send to distribution partners based on demand levels.

It is not possible to know exactly how many leaflets have been picked up, although around 35,000 have been distributed. As Glide Media only replaced empty or low running stockists and monitored take-up, it is reasonable to assume that all of the 10,000 leaflets they distributed were taken. Several partners have requested additional copies and commented that the maps are popular, but there is no method in place to track precisely how many maps have been picked up by prospective visitors.

A procurement exercise was undertaken to conduct a PR Campaign for the Cultural Tourism Map. Although three providers were approached, only one agency responded to the request for quotations, as the £8k budget was insufficient to attract interest. As only one quote was received, it was not possible to compare the value for money or the quality of the bid. This caused some issues in the delivery of the work, as there was not a shared understanding between the agency and the Council as to the scope of the tender and what could be delivered with the budget available.

The output of the PR campaign was a series of adverts depicting cultural assets and festivals featured on the map which were shared on social media and Google during the Spring. Costs for the campaign were split between the PR Team's time to come up with the branding concepts and design the adverts and paid advertising costs charged by hosting platforms. The additional time taken to clarify the brief and revise design work in response to officer comments exceed the budget allocated, reducing the amount spent on media advertising.

### **Outputs, Outcomes, and Impacts**

Most of the outputs and outcomes set for the Sustainable Tourism Programme were either reached or exceeded, with the one exception being the number of enterprises achieving grants. This is accounted for by the increase of the grant amount from the Culture, Leisure, and Tourism Fund and the Carbon Action Fund. Tourism businesses could only apply for £5,000 under CLTF but could request up to £50,000 in CAF, leading to fewer businesses receiving grants.

The number of enterprises receiving grants, increased amount of investment, increased perception of attractions, and estimated carbon reduction all relate to outputs and outcomes achieved through the £125,000 allocated from the Sustainable Tourism budget to the CLTF (2023/24) and CAF (2024/25). As separate evaluations have been conducted for those projects, the findings will not be repeated here.

As highlighted in the Year 2 evaluation, there were significant challenges involved in robustly measuring the outputs, outcomes, and impacts resulting from the Sustainable Tourism Programme. Outcomes such as visitor spending and visitor numbers are measured annually at a district level but are more likely to result from changes on a macro level and are hard to attribute to a particular project. With small amounts of funding dispersed over a high number of projects, the impact from any one activity is unlikely to be significant enough to register in the annual data.

For this reason, the targets set were only those which could be tracked through specific projects, for example, for the 'increase in visitor spend' output figure relates to year-on-year increases at TED events, rather than for the whole of East Devon. Whilst initiatives such as the beach matting and cultural tourism map are likely to have driven additional tourist numbers and spend, without any ability to track their impact, they cannot be counted in the outputs and outcomes reported back. Therefore, although the forecasts were met, the figures are likely to underrepresent what was achieved as a result of the funding.

In addition to UKSPF outputs and outcomes, the success of the EDTN is measured biannually against a set of KPIs, with reports issued in July and January. As of July 2025, 136 businesses had signed up to be members of the EDTN, an increase of 12 since the end of 2024. The original target set was for 75 members to sign-up in year 1, although this target was not updated for subsequent years. More rapid growth was

seen between 2023 and 2024 where membership jumped from 48 to 124, suggesting that the core audience for the provision had already joined.

For events held in 2024, 73% of attendees rated them 'very good' and a further 19% rated them as 'good'. No survey respondents rated them as either 'not good' or 'poor', showing they were perceived to be high quality events. The two events held in 2025 both had 100% of survey respondents rating them as 'very good'.

At a total cost of c£20,000 per year, cost per EDTN attendee was around £83 or £147 per EDTN member (as not all attendees were members). In the absence of either a comparative scheme or any knowledge on the economic impact created by the EDTN, it is not possible to ascertain if this was good value for money. However, in a survey conducted in November 2025, members were asked if they were willing to pay for membership and if so, what the maximum was they would be willing to pay on a yearly basis. Although over 72% of respondents were willing to pay for their membership, the average offered was around £70, with the most common amount proposed just £30 per year. As this is significantly below the attendee or membership costs, it suggests that actual costs exceed the monetary value placed on the network by current members.

It is worth noting that the trading conditions for the tourism sector have declined since the network was launched, as demonstrated by the [Value of Tourism](#) dataset. Therefore, the lower sums offered may be due to an inability to justify investment outside of the core business operations in the current economic picture, rather than a devaluation of the offering.

By July 2025, the EDTN had 3,126 social media followers across all platforms, reaching 50,000 against a target of 3,000. However, this time period saw the newsletter open rate reduce from 65% to 46%, suggesting that some network members may have disengaged over the course of delivery. This suggests that whilst the reach and presence of the network grew, facilitating engagement with members through digital content was less successful.

The programme-wide 'number of people reached' output was tracked across two PR campaigns, the TED festival, and the EDTN (as discussed above). The promotion for the festivals and digital engagement with EDTN members was monitored, with reach numbers derived from those clicking on links and opening newsletters sent. Although impression numbers were higher than reach, those figures only demonstrate how many times posts appeared in social media feeds and do not necessarily indicate that the material has been read or engaged with.

Reports from the PR for the Cultural Tourism Map show a clear increase in site visitors to the digital map during the campaign, with 58 page views in January 2025 increasing to 139 by March 2025. Across the distribution period for the campaign, there were 681 page views for the map and a 500% increase in those navigating directly to the map from other web locations. The Google Ads campaign run at a cost

of £2,281, yielded 11,194 clicks from 1.7m impressions, a click through rate of 0.66%. This is higher than the industry benchmark of 0.47% and represents good value for money, as the cost per click was £0.20 against a £0.33 benchmark.

Whilst engagement figures can be monitored, it is not possible to determine the relationship between the number of people reached and those visiting either East Devon or the festivals, events, and attractions promoted. As partners featured on the map were not subject to any monitoring or data sharing agreement, assessing impact is reliant on anecdotal evidence and provision of voluntary feedback. Although this creates challenges on evaluating impact, mandatory reporting would likely have discouraged partners from engaging with the projects and been overly burdensome for both those featured and council officers to request and review a large number of reports.

Communication from partners on the Cultural Tourism Map had been solely positive, with several contacting the project team to express the impacts felt. This includes case studies of visitors arriving holding the map or sharing that they were encouraged to visit featured venues due to the map. Sidmouth Museum attested that the map had “significantly increased the number of visitors”, with the higher visitor numbers attributed to tourists staying outside of Sidmouth being encouraged by the map to explore East Devon more widely. This indicates a clear benefit to local attractions resulting from the map, but this cannot be quantified in either visitor numbers or spend.

Attendance data was tracked for the Taste East Devon festival, with additional information available for those signing up for ticked events. There was good take up across ticketed events, with 93% sold, equating to 1,174 tickets. Overall, there were around 4,700 participants across all events held, a comparable figure to previous years. A notable swing from previous years was a significant increase in visitors coming from outside of the Devon, Dorset and Somerset area – 41% in 2024 compared to just 13% in 2023. This is a positive trend as visitors from further afield are likely to spend more in the visitor economy, including on accommodation.

As in previous years, qualitative feedback for the TED showed the festival was well received, with 95% of those surveyed saying they would recommend the festival to a friend, and 73% considering the events good value for money. If support for the festival continues in future years, asking survey recipients about their primary drivers for visiting East Devon and additional details on their stay would help quantify the broader economic impact of council funding.

The number of businesses receiving support largely corresponds to EDTN members and attendee numbers at the quarterly meetings, which exceeded target numbers. Assessing the impact of the support given is challenging as, like with the Cultural Tourism Map, evidenced outcomes cannot practically be expected from EDTN members. To assess the qualitative impact of the programme, a survey was conducted of EDTN members. Only 25 responses were received, representing a

response rate of around 20%, which limits the value of the conclusions drawn. Most respondents were wholly positive about their membership and able to articulate the benefits to their businesses.

93% of respondents indicated that they had improved their business practices in line with EDTN values as a result of their membership, with 47% responding that these improvements were down to collaboration with other members. Fewer businesses had improved their sustainability and accessibility practices as a result of their membership, with only six and four respondents respectively reporting these impacts, demonstrating that impact was not equally spread across all main pillars of the network. 68% of respondents said they had formed new business relationships, with many citing cross promotion of offers and accommodation facilities as key outcomes of engagement.

Comments received were largely positive with beneficiaries calling the meetings ‘interesting’, ‘informative’ and that the talks ‘trigger surprising ideas and sustain creative thought solutions’. The power of networking emerged as a consistent theme in the feedback provided, with members citing the biggest value as peer support and idea generation emerging from conversations with others in the industry.

### Evaluation Summary

Key Question	Response
1. Was the project effective?	Effectiveness varied across projects, as did the ability to track the impacts of funding awarded. Projects such as the EDTN and Cultural Tourism Map supported collaboration across the sector and were well received by partners, but the impact on wider visitor numbers and spend is unknown. The PR campaigns run did lead to increased engagement and publicity but struggled to engage a national audience.
2. Was the process of implementation efficient?	Contributing funding towards other council initiatives, such as the Beach Access Project and the Carbon Action Fund, enabled additional impact with limited additional officer time. Partnership working with external stakeholders and making use of existing assets and networks supported the efficient roll out of new projects.
3. Did the project provide good value for money?	The use of internal staff resource allowed projects such as the Cultural Tourism Map reduced the budget required significantly compared to third party delivery. However, as funding was dispersed over several initiatives with differing outputs and a varying ability to quantify beneficiary numbers, it is hard to determine value for money in terms of cost per beneficiary at a programme level.
4. Did the project provide additionality?	The EDTN and Cultural Tourism Map would not have been possible without UKSPF funding, and no similar initiatives exist in the local area. Support for the Beach Access Project accelerated the timeline of implementation although other funding sources were also used. Promotion of tourist offerings

	is carried out by other organisations, particularly Destination Management Organisations, but coverage of specific East Devon events and assets is not always guaranteed.
5. Did the project align with the strategic ambitions set out in the UKSPF Investment Plan?	The publication of the Tourism Strategy in 2022 meant that the strategic direction of the programme transitioned from being guided by the Investment Plan to the Tourism Strategy. The initial focus was more heavily weighted towards sustainability, whilst the Tourism Strategy expanded the focus to include accessibility, quality, and collaboration. The programme demonstrated strong alignment with the ambitions set out in the Tourism Strategy but adhered less closely to the Investment Plan.

### Lessons Learnt

- KPI targets set should reflect expected achievement across the lifetime of the provision, with updates targets set if the contract is amended or extended to reflect progress to date
- Methods of capturing qualitative feedback should be standardised and developed during the project design phase so it is integrated into the reporting process and included in any contracts with third party delivery providers
- All specifications, even for small contracts, must be clear about the required outputs for the budget available, with any received bids demonstrating that the organisation is able to produce the necessary goods and services for the publicised costs
- PR campaigns for events targeting a local or regional audience are less likely to attract interest from national media, which should be considered when publicising future offers to ensure time spent engaging with press organisations is used wisely
- Exit strategies should be reviewed towards the end of a provision to determine their viability and explore alternative routes to reducing dependencies on public funding
- All UKSPF funding provided should be contingent on the ability to measure at least one UKSPF output or outcome to assess the effectiveness of the provision and demonstrate impact

## East Devon VCSE Service Year 3 Evaluation

<b>Project Lead</b>	Jo Avery
<b>Intervention</b>	E11: Capacity building & infrastructure support local groups
<b>Total Allocation</b>	£180,000
<b>Year 3 Allocation</b>	£60,000
<b>Year 3 Spend</b>	£60,000

<b>Output</b>	<b>Target (across 3 years)</b>	<b>Achieved</b>
Number of amenities/facilities created or improved	5	7
Number of organisations receiving non-financial support	100	140
Number of Tourism, Culture or Heritage assets created or improved	5	10
Number of people attending training sessions	50	210
<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Target (across 3 years)</b>	<b>Achieved</b>
Improved engagement numbers	50	204

### Background

East Devon's VCSE support service was procured in Year 1 of the UKSPF Programme, with Devon Communities Together (DCT) awarded the three-year contract to run the project. In Year 2, DCT commenced delivery with a series of listening events where they met with community organisations across the district to determine what support was required and to advertise the new service available. Year 3 followed a similar model to Year 2, with outreach activities, training sessions, and 1-2-1 support acting as the core offerings. Using the learning gained through experience, feedback, and listening sessions, the support offer was continually refined and tailored to best meet the needs of East Devon's VCSE sector.

Support for the VCSE sector in Devon is multi-layered, with representative groups, forums, and funding streams operating at different geographies and meeting different niches. As a key player and convening power of the sector, DCT is well placed to identify where additional support is needed and avoid duplication of broader work streams.

As the larger community organisations and umbrella groups are well connected through existing forums, East Devon's VCSE support service decided to take a town or neighbourhood approach and support the smaller charitable organisations who operate on a hyper-local level. These groups formed the core audience for delivery of the service.

## Activities

Delivery of the VCSE support service comprised four main activities: 1-2-1 support, training sessions, facilitating peer-to-peer networks, and representing East Devon in wider regional partnerships. As the majority of UKSPF funding is allocated to staffing hours, with a small amount ringfenced for expenses such as venue hire, DCT have considerable flexibility to determine the activities delivered. This approach has enabled them to be responsive to demand and redirect support hours to the most impactful activities.

Training sessions offered were either 'deep dives' or 'bite sized' and covered topics such as business planning, VCSE governance, digital skills, and marketing. The subjects were determined based on feedback from community organisations, with the length, location, and topic varied to attract maximum levels of interest. In the absence of a dedicated training budget, all training sessions are delivered by DCT staff, which somewhat restricts what can be covered. It also means more specialised or accredited training courses, such as safeguarding, cannot be accommodated within the programme.

Attendance at training sessions has been mixed, with some attracting a higher degree of interest than others. To ensure the maximum impact was achieved for all hours of staff support dedicated to the project, training sessions with fewer than 5 attendees were cancelled. Although participant feedback has been positive and listening sessions have indicated a demand for training, securing the time commitment required to attend training sessions has been a challenge.

Small charities, which may be predominantly run by a single person, can struggle to take time out of their work day to attend training, and even when freely offered, the costs of travel and lost working hours can be prohibitive. Running sessions online can address some of these challenges, but DCT report lower engagement levels with online courses. One proposed solution was to cover additional costs for participants, but there is no scope to do this with the current budget.

The 1-2-1 support offered to organisations varied according to individual need but was co-ordinated around the core themes of financial sustainability, volunteer management, and business management. This included creating clear business plans and budgets, supporting the recruitment and retention of volunteers, and supporting organisations to apply for grant funding opportunities. These activities all link to the overall Theory of Change and primary goal of equipping VCSE organisations with the tools they need to operate independently.

The main challenge involved in delivering the support was engaging the East Devon VCSE sector, many of whom had become accustomed to operating without help and were reluctant to admit they required assistance. This was also experienced in the previous year, suggesting that a longer operational window is required to penetrate

the sector and build trust. This demonstrates the importance of longer-term funding cycles where engagement exercises are given sufficient time to bear fruit.

An important element of the VCSE service's function is to connect community organisations in the district and facilitate peer-to-peer support networks. This is done partly through the management of the East Devon page of Devon Connect, an online platform which advertises volunteering opportunities and local events. It is the main platform used by VCSE organisations across the county to post listings and functions as a social networking site, where groups can talk to each other and join groups.

The East Devon page advertises over 130 local activities and almost 200 members are based in the district. Managing this site ensures there is a centralised hub for VCSE organisations and volunteers to gain awareness of what is happening in the area and to foster networks beyond sessions organised by DCT.

DCT also act as a facilitator for other peer support networks, such as the Volunteer Management Peer Support Network, where organisations are brought together to share best practice and collectively problem solve. With the limited budget available, DCT have increasingly encouraged peer networking so organisations can support each other and share learning gained through both experience and formal training. This reduces reliance on DCT staff members whilst maximising value from the support offered if those trained can provide help to others facing the same challenges.

Additionally, DCT have provided a key point of connection between EDDC and the local VCSE sector. The Financial Resilience Pilot in Dunkeswell and the VCSE 'Thank You' event hosted by EDDC in February 2025 were both supported by DCT who provided facilitation and coordination to the council. With the connections to the local VCSE sector built up over previous years of delivery, the service is well placed to support EDDC with wider community engagement projects and link them to local community leaders.

The final activity carried out was representing East Devon in wider partnership networks. DCT is a key player in the regional landscape, including acting as chair of the Torbay, Plymouth, and Devon VCSE Assembly and serving as Devon's member of the Action with Rural Communities in England (ACRE). Their position as a leader in the sector makes them perfectly positioned to deliver the support service, both by sharing the latest opportunities with East Devon based organisations and communicating back the main challenges experienced.

As the majority of funding is allocated to staff time and such a broad range of activities are carried out, it is difficult to produce an accurate cost-benefit analysis of the support service. The management of staff time is left at DCT's discretion, with regular reviews held to ensure each hour used it having the intended impact and relates back to the overall theory of change. Although this model makes it harder to

relate all the costs incurred to the outputs delivered, there are considerable benefits to this, more flexible, approach.

An output-based payment schedule would have committed DCT to a fixed support model from the outset, leaving little room to accommodate fluctuations in demand for one type of support. As there has been a considerable gap in support provisions for the VCSE sector, predictions on support requirements at the outset of the programme may have varied significantly from real need. Given the need for a more responsive programme and the variety of support offered, the pricing model selected was appropriate for this provision.

An output-based payment schedule would commit DCT to a fixed support model from the outset, leaving little room to accommodate fluctuations in demand for one type of support. As there has been a considerable gap in support provisions for the VCSE sector, predictions on support requirements at the outset of the programme may have varied significantly from real need. Given the need for a more responsive programme and the variety of support offered, the pricing model selected was appropriate for this provision. However, this has made it challenging to evaluate the value for money achieved from a cost per output basis.

Funding for the service was issued upfront, enabling ongoing delivery of the VCSE after the end of the financial year. However, in the absence of additional UKSPF funding, the future of the provision is now reliant on an internal budget being secured.

### **Outputs, Outcomes, and Impacts**

All outputs and outcomes were not only met but exceeded within the UKSPF delivery window. These were all monitored and reported on a quarterly basis, alongside a list of eight key performance indicators (KPIs) which were more specific to the activities of the VCSE support service.

Whilst some outputs, such as organisations receiving non-financial support, were well aligned with the delivery plan, others were significantly more challenging to achieve. Two outputs selected related to improvement of facilities and physical assets, which were not the focus of the support offered. In the absence of any capital budget to carry out works, it was difficult to relate the activities carried out to these impacts. Those reported against these outputs were organisations with physical assets that went on to improve their facilities after accessing support, for example those receiving bid writing training who then successfully applied for funding.

This issue has occurred across the UKSPF Programme due to insufficient information about outputs and outcomes being published prior to the Investment Plan being drawn up. As the definitions were not available and projects had not been fully scoped before target outputs were set, it was hard to select indicators accurately.

The additional KPIs provide greater insight to the benefits organisations received from engaging with the service. Of the 281 organisations engaged with, 193 of them were provided with guidance and training, the most popular type of support offered. Just over half the organisations were supported with their marketing offer, whilst 48% were helped to apply for funding. As a result of the service, 16 new organisations were helped to set up their operations.

Whilst the outcome of the support given is not known for all organisations supported, a number of case studies demonstrate how impactful the service has been on local VCSE groups. One example is Sidmouth Bowling Club, who were looking to source grant funding for accessible toilet facilities. They firstly received support to find grant opportunities and were signposted towards two pots they were eligible for. After attending a bid writing workshop, they submitted two funding applications and were successful in both, receiving £12,000 in grant funding.

This case study demonstrates the effectiveness of the service in providing helpful and instructive guidance and supporting an organisation throughout the grant application process. It also shows how the support offered can have a multiplier effect, with the small cost per organisation supported unlocking far greater sums.

To help assess the impact of the VCSE support service, EDDC conducted a public survey in May 2025. Questions asked included ‘have you heard of the VCSE support service?’, ‘did the service deliver what you needed?’, and ‘which activities did you attend/receive?’. The response rate was low, with only eight respondents from community organisations.

Amongst this group, most had both heard of and used the VCSE support service within the last two years. Of the seven respondents who had used the service, there was a broad range of satisfaction levels, although 5/5 was the most common score awarded. The two who gave a 1 and a 2 both indicated that the reason for their score was because staffing changes at DCT had made accessing support difficult, rather than the quality of provision being low.

The low response rate makes drawing any firm conclusions from the survey difficult. This is not a unique problem to the VCSE service, as eliciting feedback from beneficiaries has been a consistent challenge in evaluating the impact of the UKSPF programme.

## Evaluation Summary

<b>Key Question</b>	<b>Response</b>
1. Was the project effective?	The VCSE service was effective at supporting local community organisations with training opportunities, personalised guidance, and facilitating peer networks. However, the service is yet to fully permeate the sector and further trust and awareness still needs to be built.

2. Was the process of implementation efficient?	As no new activities or services were implemented this year, this is outside the scope of this evaluation.
3. Did the project provide good value for money?	Value for money is difficult to determine as the budget is spent on increased capacity through staffing costs and is not clearly linked to either specific elements of delivery or a primary output or outcome.
4. Did the project provide additionality?	The focus of support has been on smaller, hyperlocal community organisations to avoid duplicating wider, regional programmes. DCT's knowledge and connections of the wider landscape ensures this provision is targeted to existing support gaps.
5. Did the project align with the strategic ambitions set out in the UKSPF Investment Plan?	The support service met the ambition to coordinate the VCSE sector, help organisations set up, and support them to gain funding. However, the longer-term ambition to make the sector self-sustaining without further need for public support has not been met.

### Lessons Learnt

- Ensure programmes have flexibility to reprofile or reselect outputs and outcomes to align with any changes in project delivery models.
- Request feedback from beneficiaries at the time of support to maximise likelihood of feedback responses
- Include a standardised reporting template to ensure all factors needed for monitoring and evaluation are covered in reports provided
- Ensure long-term funding is in place for provisions that require a build-up of support, trust, and awareness
- Further information is required on how allocated funding is spent by the VCSE service to determine the value for money for the outputs achieved.

# Swapped Projects Introduction

## Background

In September 2024, the Ministry for Housing, Communities, and Local Government issued updated guidance to all Lead Local Authorities for UKSPF. Whilst previous wording had suggested that the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2025 spend deadline related only to funding defrayed from EDDC's accounts, the new guidance was explicit in stating that any third party awarded UKSPF funding must also be fully spent by this date.

This new guidance posed a serious threat to the delivery of EDDC's UKSPF programme, as many projects were reliant on third party delivery partners being able to continue delivery beyond the end of March. The two most heavily impacted projects were the Active Travel Fund and the Action on Poverty Fund, both of which had large budgets and a planned delivery window beyond the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.

With almost £400k of UKSPF funding at risk of being returned from these two projects alone, an alternative plan was needed. After confirming with MHCLG that UKSPF could be used in place of internally allocated funding, internal projects were sought where activity aligned with the strategic ambitions of UKSPF. The proposed route was to use UKSPF funding to deliver these projects in the 2024/25 financial year and transfer the saved internal budget to the Action on Poverty and Active Travel funds, to be spent in the subsequent financial year. This would remove the time pressure and allow the same number of projects to be completed for the same budget.

Two projects were identified as meeting both the timeline requirements and aligning with UKSPF interventions, one of which provided capital funding and the other revenue. The first was Phase 1 of the Public Toilets Improvement Programme (PTIP), which had a total budget of £3.15m, far in excess of the amounts required by UKSPF. The revenue project identified was the East Devon Carbon Action Programme (EDCAP) which had an internal budget of £207,000, jointly funded by the business support budget and council funding set aside to support decarbonisation projects.

The proposal was given approval by Cabinet on 27 November 2024, with senior officers given delegated authority to sign off the final amounts to be swapped between UKSPF and internal budgets within a given range.

Although this enabled the Active Travel Fund and Action on Poverty Fund to progress and prevented a vast amount of underspend being returned to MHCLG, it created complexity in defining which projects fell under the UKSPF umbrella. Whilst neither Active Travel nor Action on Poverty were technically funded by UKSPF in Year 3, they were directly enabled by UKSPF and would not have proceeded without it. Since neither project was able to make significant progress during Year 3, they have been combined into a single document.

## Active Travel Fund Year 3 Evaluation

<b>Project Lead</b>	Paul Osborne
<b>Intervention</b>	E7: Support for active travel enhancements in the local area
<b>Total Allocation</b>	£200,000
<b>Year 3 Allocation</b>	£200,000
<b>Year 3 Spend</b>	£0

<b>Output</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Achieved</b>
Total length of new or improved cycle ways or foot paths	650m	0
Number of new or improved cycle ways or foot paths	3	0
Number of neighbourhood improvements undertaken	3	0
<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Achieved</b>
Increased use of cycleways or foot paths	15%	0

### Background

East Devon has the second fastest growing population in the South West, largely due to the creation of the new town of Cranbrook. To support the development of sustainable settlements and reduce pressure on existing travel infrastructure, the Investment Plan put aside £200k of UKSPF funding for active travel routes in the West End, with two options proposed. This was all allocated for Year 3 to allow for further development of the two proposals and begin the design and preparation work.

The aim was to reduce travel by car, with new routes making active travel a more accessible option for both leisure and commuting. The benefits of increased cycling and walking are well evidenced in both reducing carbon emissions, tackling congestion and air pollution and boosting physical and mental health.

The first project considered in the Investment Plan was the delivery of 650m of the cycle path between Cranbrook and Exeter, with the path cutting across the Station Road Nature Reserve. The second was a quiet lane initiative in the Clyst Valley Regional Park, with car use limited on certain roads to prioritise bike use. It was left open which option would progress, with scope to choose a third alternative if a more suitable opportunity emerged.

## Activities

Planning for the new active travel route began halfway through Year 2, with a new Project Lead appointed due to personnel changes. The first action required was to decide which option to progress, with the 650m cycle path connecting Mosshayne Lane and Station Road selected. This forms part of the route between Cranbrook and Exeter and enables access to that section of the Clyst Valley Regional Park (CVRP).

From the outset, there were viability challenges which threatened prompt delivery of the cycle path. As the 650m represented only a small section of the Cranbrook to Exeter route, it was important to secure the permissions and budget for the whole route to avoid building a 'path to nowhere'. When the planned project was presented to the UKSPF Panel for approval, their support was conditional on the remainder of the route being built and Devon County Council agreeing to adopt the path once complete.

Securing the relevant permissions and budgets proved complicated, as these had to be sourced from multiple pots, committees, and authorities. The cost of the whole route was estimated at £4.7m, with a £2m commitment from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) required to fill the funding gap. In addition to Planning Permission from EDDC for the CVRP, DCC also had to grant permission as the Highways Authority. With funding and permissions entangled with the wider delivery of the CVRP, these were time consuming to obtain.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was sent to DCC in March 2024 to guarantee their commitment to adopting and completing the cycle path. Despite issuing several deadlines to respond, the document remained unsigned by DCC for 12 months, only getting approval in March 2025. This was partly due to rising costs of delivery, which generated reluctance from DCC to make the commitments set forth in the MoU.

Delivery of the cycle path was time bound, with works only able to take place on site during part of the year due to weather restrictions. With the planned start date in early Autumn of 2024 looking increasingly unlikely and works unable to take place from October onwards, the likelihood of completing spend by March 2025 became scarcer. One option considered was passing the funding to DCC via a grant agreement to manage the procurement and pay contractors, which would show that the funding was fully spent from EDDC's accounts. However, as the updated guidance mandated that all activities were complete, this was not a viable route for preventing underspend. This left the budget swapping exercise as the only feasible route to avoid returning the £200k whilst proceeding with the path.

The challenges in delivering the cycle path were largely outside of officers' control, with the main hold up due to DCC not signing the MoU for a year. Although the UKSPF-funded section was not a major infrastructure project in its own right, work

starting was dependent on the permissions and funding coming through for the rest of the route, meaning it was caught up in the additional complexities of the larger project. Even with preparation work commencing midway through the programme, the timeline afforded to the project was insufficient.

Work on the site eventually commenced in Summer 2025, with DCC successful in securing CIL funding for the remainder of the route in addition to EDDC's contribution for delivering the CVRP. The majority of works were complete before winter set in, but the final surfacing is still outstanding, meaning the path will not be operational until Spring 2026. Delivery of the remaining route is not due to commence for another two years, meaning the benefits of the cycle way will not be clear until long after UKSPF ends.

### **Outputs, Outcomes, and Impacts**

There were three outputs and one outcome for the Active Travel Fund, but as the path was not completed during the UKSPF timeframe, none of these were achieved in time to report back to MHCLG. Although this was partly due to the unforeseen delays, had the path completed on time, reporting increased uptake of the path would've been difficult without the whole route completed.

On a longer monitoring time frame the 650m of new cycle path will come be realised, achieving one new cycle path. As there was only sufficient funding for one section of path, the target of three new cycle paths and neighbourhood improvements were overly ambitious and unlikely to come forward in the longer term as a result of UKSPF funding.

### **Lessons Learnt**

- For short-term funding programmes, infrastructure projects must be 'shovel-ready', with the relevant permissions and match funding secured from the outset, even if delivery is not due to commence for two or so years.
- Any output and outcome targets set should reflect the expected measurable impact within the reporting timeframe. The targets and indicators selected should be revised if this timeframe is altered.
- In the event of severe delays and fundamental viability challenges emerging, a strict deadline should be set from the outset for large capital projects to resolve these issues, with funding re-diverted if the risk of non-delivery becomes too high.
- Where UKSPF funded elements are subordinate to the wider project, relevant permissions and budget agreement for the larger element should be secured prior to commencement of the UKSPF intervention.

## Action on Poverty Fund Year 3 Evaluation

<b>Project Lead</b>	Sharon Church
<b>Intervention</b>	E13: Community measures to reduce the cost of living, including through measures to improve energy efficiency, and combat fuel poverty and climate change.
<b>Total Allocation</b>	£139,452
<b>Original Year 3 Allocation</b>	£70,119
<b>Revised Year 3 Allocation</b>	£139,452
<b>Year 3 Spend</b>	£7,869

<b>Output</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Achieved</b>
Number of organisations receiving grants	28	0
Number of households receiving support	100	5
Number of households supported to take up energy efficiency measures	25	5
<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Achieved</b>
Estimated Carbon dioxide equivalent reductions as a result of support	4	2
Increased take up of energy efficiency measures	25	5

### Background

Originally run using internal funding, around £140,000 of UKSPF funding was allocated to continuing the Action on Poverty Fund into 2023/24 and 2024/25. The aim of the fund was to provide small grants to community organisations to implement initiatives designed to tackle poverty.

With no staff resource in place to continue the scheme in its first iteration, a second model was trialled, with grants distributed to households in poverty to purchase energy efficiency measures. Using a dashboard which identified residents living in low EPC rated properties and experiencing financial hardship, 72 residents were invited to apply for grants.

The uptake from residents offered grants was far lower than expected, with only 18 applications submitted, some of which were not suitable or did not proceed. Proposed explanations for the lack of demand are covered in the Year 2 evaluation. This meant very little of the budget was committed by the end of Year 2 and necessitated another revision of the delivery model. Since MHCLG permitted Year 2

underspend to be carried forward, the total allocation for Year 2 was reassigned to the Year 3 budget.

## **Activities**

All spend reported against the Action on Poverty Fund in Year 3 relates to the grants to households awarded in Year 2, for which payments were made in early 2024/25. In addition to the low demand levels previously mentioned, there was a lack of internal capacity to undertake site visits, identify suitable measures, and follow-up with households. With a lack of resource presenting a repeated obstacle to distributing the Action on Poverty Fund, and it soon became clear that the best route to delivery was to engage a third party.

Exeter Community Energy (ECO), a community energy organisation serving the East Devon area, were approached to run the Action on Poverty Fund on EDDC's behalf. As existing partners on other poverty-reduction projects and local experts in providing retrofit advice, they were best placed to manage the fund and ensure the best outcomes for grant recipients.

Although the proposal was approved by the UKSPF Programme Management Panel, as the sums involved exceeded £100,000, the decision needed to be formally approved and publicised. When Cabinet gave approval for the UKSPF Programme in July 2022, authority was delegated to the Director of Place to allocate the funding, amend existing projects, and approve new projects up to the value of £800,000. Therefore, an Officer Executive Decision could be made, with Councillors notified and given the option to object within a set time frame.

The next stage was to draw up a grant funding agreement between EDDC and ECO so the monies could be transferred. Under the terms of the agreement, the entire remaining UKSPF Action on Poverty Fund budget would be given over to ECO to distribute as grant funding, with ECO receiving £10,000 to run and manage the scheme. This came from remaining internal budget from the pre-UKSPF Action on Poverty Fund.

As the monies transferred were a combination of funding to be retained and distributed by ECO, drafting a robust legal document proved more complicated than anticipated. There are different requirements for a grant award and paying for a service, and it was proposed by EDDC's Legal Team that a Service Level Agreement may need to be used rather than a Grant Agreement. To further add to the complexity, there was a change in how ECO was formally structured during this time period, which meant the organisation named on the documents was considered new. The credit check conducted flagged the new entity as risky due to its lack of credit history, which triggered concerns from the Legal Team about distributing the funding to ECO.

The need to seek further, external legal advice on the appropriate contract structure and ensuring sufficient safeguards were in place to reduce the risk to the Council served to delay the distribution of funding significantly. Despite work beginning on the grant agreement in November 2024, the document had still not been finalised and signed by February 2026. Therefore, the updated government guidance was not the primary reason why the budget swapping exercise was necessary, with the delays in getting the agreement finalised threatening the return of the entire budget to MHCLG.

### **Outputs, Outcomes, and Impacts**

All outputs and outcomes reported relate to the five grants issued to households for measures such as loft insulation. The number of households receiving support is far below the target number, as the actual spend was minimal compared to the budget. As discussed above and covered in the Year 2 evaluation, this was due to a lack of interest from the households approached.

No organisations were awarded funding as the adaptations to the delivery model meant that grants went to households rather than community organisations. As ECOE will continue with this model, this output is no longer relevant for the fund. It is anticipated that the targets for 'number of households supported' and 'households receiving support to take-up energy efficiency measures' will eventually be met once the swapped funding is spent in the forthcoming financial year.

As the outcome regarding carbon reduction only requests forecast estimates, this could be calculated based on expected savings from the measures installed. For each household receiving a grant, figures from EPC estimates were used to predict the carbon savings per year resulting from the energy efficiency equipment installed. As no follow-ups were done to confirm the accuracy, nor were any carbon surveys carried out by experts on the properties, the actual reduction a year after installation is unknown.

The wider impacts of the funding spent are also unknown. With only five households supported and the challenges experienced regarding staff capacity, no follow-up has been done on the individuals who received funding.

### **Lessons Learnt**

- Clearer internal guidance is required on entering into legal contracts with external partners, including information on the most appropriate type of agreement to use.
- Due Diligence checks should be conducted prior to drawing up legal agreements to ensure the level of risk presented is acceptable and that delivery partners are in a solid position to carry out their obligations.

- At the programme design phase, conversations between council services should be held to determine the support services required and the in-house capacity to handle these requests. Where support needs exceed internal resource, a small budget should be reserved to bring in external support. Both the programme requirements and the internal capacity should be reviewed annually to maintain a shared understanding across services.
- Projects using the outcome 'estimated carbon dioxide equivalent reductions as a result of support' should implement a robust and standardised method of calculating these reductions and following up with beneficiaries after one year to confirm actual savings achieved.