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Action on Poverty Year 2 Evaluation

Project Lead	Sharon Church
Intervention	Intervention: E13 community measures to reduce the cost of living
Total Allocation	£139,452
Year 2 Allocation	£69,333
Year 2 Spend	£0

Output	Target (across Years 2 and 3)	Achieved (in Year 2)
Number of organisations receiving grants	28	0
Number of households receiving support	100	0
Number of households supported to take up energy efficiency measures	25	0
Outcome	Target (across 2 years)	Achieved (in Year 2)
Estimated Carbon dioxide equivalent reductions as a result of support	4	0
Increased take up of energy efficiency measures	25	0

Background:

East Devon District Council first ran the [Action on Poverty Fund](#) grant scheme in the 2022/23 financial year using internal funding with the aim of supporting community projects designed to tackle poverty. It provided small grants between £500 to £5,000 to community organisations who could demonstrate that their projects aligned with EDDC's Poverty Strategy. As the UKSPF Investment Plan identified lower wages comparative to national averages and poverty as key challenges for East Devon, continuation of the scheme was included as a planned project.

This proposal provided funding for the existing scheme into the 2023/24 and 2024/25 financial years, with grants issued to projects tackling hidden poverty, support for residents reliant on food banks, and provision of advice regarding budgeting and reducing debt. An additional focus was introduced on addressing fuel poverty by giving out grants for the implementation of energy efficiency measures, thus lowering bills, cutting carbon emissions, and creating warmer homes.

Year 2 Activity:

The first challenge encountered in the delivery of the Action on Poverty Fund was the lack of staff resource to implement the project. With the long-term absence of the original staff member who designed and oversaw the Action on Poverty Fund, the scheme was left without a Project Lead. It was hoped that another member of the Communications Team, who ran the scheme in 2022/23, could be deployed to lead

the project. As Year 2 approached the halfway mark and no staff resource was found, it became necessary to explore alternative options for spending the Action on Poverty allocation.

The Financial Resilience Team, who lead on many anti-poverty projects including the [Household Support Fund](#), were approached to identify any existing schemes which could make use of the funding. At the time, they were leading on a pilot scheme to fund major repair work to privately owned homes in unliveable conditions where occupants were experiencing financial hardship. As part of this work, the Financial Resilience Team had collated a dashboard of homeowners living in poverty, which showed the EPC rating and a list of recommended energy efficiency upgrades for each property.

Although many residents on the dashboard were able to access other funding pots, there were certain types of energy efficiency measures and homeowners who required support but didn't meet the criteria for other schemes. The Financial Resilience Team submitted a proposal to use the Action on Poverty funding to support those homeowners who fell through the gaps, using the EPC data to identify which measures they required. The intention was to reach out to around 75 households, with each households receiving works costing between £500 and £1,500. Any remaining funding was to be redirected to the pilot scheme and provide energy efficiency upgrades to properties being repaired under that project.

The proposal to redirect the Action on Poverty funding to enact this proposal was presented to, and approved by, the UKSPF Panel in October 2023. After this, work commenced on drafting letters offering free energy efficiency measures and sending them out to identified residents. To receive the support, households needed to complete a short application form and return it to the council. This was a time sensitive process as it was hoped work could be done in early winter to maximise take-up and allow residents to benefit from the upgrades for the coldest months.

However, coordinating the new governance arrangements proved more challenging than anticipated. While determining where authority to sign off the grant award letters sat, some issues were raised by EDDC's Legal Team as to whether the appropriate delegated authority had been secured.

Due to changes in internal processes between Cabinet approval for the UKSPF Investment Plan in 2022 and the award letters being issued in 2023, there was a lack of clarity regarding the proper process required to authorise these grants. Although the scheme had received Cabinet approval in 2022 via its inclusion in the Investment Plan, there was no specific reference given to these grant awards and the explicit delegation of authority to an officer.

With new governance processes still being worked through, there was no clear process to follow and a lack of shared understanding between council teams on how to proceed. Due to these issues, the letters were not sent out until mid-December, missing the ideal window to offer this support. The proximity to Christmas meant residents had less time to complete the forms and couldn't contact the council to verify the authenticity of the letters due to the Christmas shutdown. Crucially, it

meant residents would miss out on the benefits of the support for a large amount of the winter.

Although 72 residents were offered the support, only 18 applications were submitted, which was significantly less than the anticipated figure of 45-54. When reviewing and approving these applications, further challenges arose. In altering the grant beneficiaries from organisations to households, additional checks needed to be undertaken which were not required in the original Action on Poverty scheme.

Through its alignment with the pilot scheme, officers from Private Sector Housing were engaged with the delivery of Action on Poverty in Year 2. In reviewing the applications, they identified concerns with the planned process and highlighted a need to undertake visits to all applicants. This step had not been anticipated and caused further delays to projects commencing as the high workload of the team made it hard to find time for these additional visits. However, the site visits were quickly demonstrated to be a necessary process due to the issues they raised.

Whilst the dashboard had used EPC reports to identify recommended energy efficiency measures, the visits showed that in some cases these measures had already been implemented and were no longer necessary. More importantly, the dashboard omitted the enabling works that needed to be done in tandem with energy efficiency measures. One example is the need for improved ventilation in houses where insulation is installed, without which the risk of damp and mould increases. If these factors hadn't been considered and ameliorated, EDDC risked introducing new problems to the homes, undermining the ethos of the scheme.

Although this challenge could be resolved by permitting a limited amount of funding to be used for these enabling works, the already small pools of applicants dwindled over time as households pulled out due to delays or were deemed ineligible. As these applications proceeded, a further issue occurred in sourcing three quotes for each piece of work due to national shortages in the sector. Due to the small amounts involved, the requirement for three quotes was waived, with works proceeding as long as quotes were deemed reasonable.

Although some work was carried out under the scheme in Year 2, as all works were paid for in arrears, no funding was paid out during the 2023/24 Financial Year. This left the full year's allocation in danger of being returned to central government, so two additional ideas were considered to spend the remaining funding. The first was to commit more of the Action on Poverty Fund to the pilot scheme and issue larger grants of several thousand pounds to more significant renovations. However, as the pilot scheme also experienced delays for similar reasons, there was no active spend for which Action on Poverty could be used.

The second proposal was to write to an additional 70 economically vulnerable households across East Devon's park home sites to target a wider pool of potential applications. Although the letters were drafted, they were never sent out as the lack of staff capacity meant ability to carry out the works if there was a high proportion of respondents served as a potential issue. The challenges experienced with the first

round of applicants were still in place, so replicating the approach did not seem an effective delivery method.

As EDDC were permitted to roll over the Action on Poverty allocation into the 2024/25 financial year, the funding was carried forward with the intention to find a third alternative delivery method in Year 3.

Outputs, Outcomes, and Impacts

As no money was spent during Year 2 of the Year 2 Action on Poverty allocation, there were also no outputs, outcomes, or impacts realised. However, there were some works commenced during Year 2, from which households would eventually benefit, and some residents received assistance and advice from the site visits undertaken.

Lessons Learnt:

- Collaborations between council teams require a high degree of communication, specifically regarding capacity and the staff resource available for the project.
- Reviews of existing schemes are an important part of scheme design and research to avoid duplication and identify gaps in existing provision. This is most significant when there is a fragmented funding landscape and multiple providers operating in a single area.
- A single, consistent Project Lead from project design to implementation is crucial to the success of a project. The Project Lead must have sufficient capacity to steer the project, with their time allocated via Service Plans and PER objectives. In the absence of a clear Project Lead, funding should be reallocated to an alternative scheme.
- Clear governance arrangements need to be implemented prior to the commencement of a project, with the relevant internal processes and requirements made available in a consistent and accessible format to officers.

Business Support Programme Year 2 Evaluation

Project Lead	Tom Winters	
Intervention	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.	
Total Allocation	£190,804	
Year 2 Allocation	£78,416	
Year 2 Spend	£78,416	
Output	Target (across 3 years)	Achieved
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	102	50
Number of potential entrepreneurs assisted to be enterprise ready	34	20
Outcome	Target (across 3 years)	Achieved
Number of enterprises adopting new to the firm technologies or processes	25	8
Number of enterprises with improved productivity	30	4
Number of enterprises adopting new or improved products or services	6	4
Number of new enterprises created as a result of support	15	5
Jobs created as a result of support	10	1

Background

Prior to the UK's departure from the European Union, businesses in East Devon could access generalist business support programme, fully funded through EU Regional Development Funding (ERDF). Known as 'Thrive', it was administered by Devon County Council (DCC) and provided 1-2-1 support, workshops, and tailored advice and guidance to help local businesses grow and improve their resilience.

Thrive support ceased in July 2023 with the end of EU funding. With UKSPF introduced as a replacement for ERDF, it was a key priority for EDDC continue the provision of free business support. Historically, East Devon has benefitted disproportionately from county-wide business support programmes, with take up in the district exceeding all others, even when adjusted for size. This presented a clear strategic case for its continuation.

After it was announced that all UKSPF funding would be devolved to district councils, DCC shared a list of priority projects which they hoped to see funded or continued

under UKSPF. This list included Thrive and other business support programmes such as pre-start support and specialist support for the agritech sector, all to be delivered across Devon and managed by DCC. This was followed by a more detailed initial proposal in June 2022 which included indicative costs, outputs, and outcomes.

This proposal formed the basis of the Business Support Programme included in EDDC's Investment Plan. The outline in the investment plan made specific reference to working with other districts to create a unified, single offer to businesses across Devon, with DCC intended as the managing organisation.

As funding for Thrive was still in place for the duration of Year 1 of UKSPF, delivery of the new support offer was scheduled for Years 2 and 3. All activity on the Business Support Programme in Year 1 was dedicated to refining and agreeing the terms of the contract between EDDC and DCC.

Year 1 and Year 2 Activity

The Business Support Programme is a jointly commissioned piece of work, with East Devon District Council pooling its allocation with Exeter City Council and Mid Devon District Council to deliver a generalist business support service across all three areas. As outlined in the Investment Plan, Devon County Council are administering the programme for the three districts and were responsible for the procurement process and the ongoing monitoring and management of the programme.

The original proposal suggested by DCC in June 2022 contained four key elements: generalist support, start-up support, green business support, and specialist support for the agri-tech sector. The service was not just intended to replace Thrive, but to incorporate elements of other previously funded business support projects such as 'Devon Get Started' which provided start-up support, and the Devon AgriTech Alliance (DATA).

As only three districts opted to include the proposal in their Investment Plan, indicative costs and outputs needed revising at a later stage, as original calculations were provided on the assumption that five or six districts would participate. Although options were explored between the three districts to jointly procure a support offer without DCC, none of the authorities had the necessary time or staff resource to undertake the procurement.

A revised proposal was issued by DCC in December 2022, with some significant differences to the original. With costs now based on a contribution of c£185,000 from three districts over two years, the percentage retained by DCC as administrative costs increased from 19% to 24%, costing EDDC an additional £10,000 over the lifetime of the programme. Additionally, the revised proposal forecast lower targets for the outputs and outcomes than those pledged in EDDC's Investment Plan, with some excluded altogether.

With all three districts aiming at different outputs and outcomes and targeting different aspects of support, it was a challenge to create a unified programme that addressed all the requirements. This led to delays in getting grant agreements signed off, as the differing expectations of EDDC and DCC only came to light in April

2023. Although EDDC had shared their Investment Plan with DCC and DCC had produced a proposal that did not match these commitments, this was not picked up on by either party until the first issuance of a draft grant agreement in March 2023. This issue was eventually resolved, with EDDC and DCC reaching a compromise position and target numbers set below EDDC's expectations and above DCC's proposal.

EDDCs rationale for jointly commissioning a business support provision was to reduce costs via economies of scale, reduce staff time requirements, and improve awareness of the service by spreading it across a wider geographical area. Although EDDC actively encouraged other districts to participate to maximise these efficiencies, low uptake of DCC's offer diminished the benefits of joint commissioning, as was seen with the increased overhead costs.

This suggests that funding and responsibility for generalist business support may function more efficiently if devolved to an upper tier authority who can coordinate and align support on a wider area. This would have avoided many issues experienced in the set-up of the support provision, such as the misunderstandings surrounding forecast outputs and outcomes, and the difficulties in forming a singular service from three differing Investment Plan projects.

Procurement

After the grant agreements had been signed by all parties, DCC went through an open procurement process to appoint a provider for the contract. Due to the size and value of the contract, open procurement was the only option available. The contract was divided into four lots: general business support, green business support, start-up support, and job creation.

Whilst the first three lots were aligned exactly with the proposals discussed, EDDC only discovered the inclusion of the job creation lot when the award was announced. DCC's proposals did not include 'number of jobs created' as an outcome, but as it had been forecast in EDDC's Investment Plan, it was added as a target metric in the grant agreement. As DCC felt this could only be achieved through specific, separate support, the fourth lot was included in the procurement despite no consultation with EDDC.

In September 2023, the Business Information Point (BIP)/Cosmic consortium was awarded the contract to deliver the business support programme. They had been the main provider of Thrive support, with BIP covering all of Devon save for North Devon, West Devon, and Torridge, and Cosmic providing digital support across the region. This enabled them to commence delivery quickly once they had secured the contract.

The new programme was named 'Prosper' to maintain continuity with Thrive. A package of marketing materials was developed and shared ahead of the September launch to ensure a consistent brand identity across the districts. Prosper was officially launched in September 2023, with businesses able to register their interest online.

Delivery

Businesses interested in accessing Prosper support can either be referred into or self-refer to the service. They receive an initial diagnostic consultation with a BIP adviser to determine what support they need and what resources they can access. The programme was designed deliberately to be flexible and provide businesses with the amount of support commensurate to their requirements.

In addition to one-to-one support, delivery included a series of workshops, with location alternating between the districts and topics taken from each lot. No workshops were held in East Devon during Year 2 due to the constrained time for delivery once the procurement exercise commenced.

Agri-Tech Support

£20,000 of the total Business Support Programme budget was allocated to supporting the agri-tech sector, with the funding split equally across Year 2 and 3. This element builds on and complements the Devon Agri-Tech Alliance (DATA) which was set up under the Community Renewal Fund (CRF), a previous central government funding programme.

The aim of the agri-tech support is to assist agricultural businesses to innovate by connecting them to research organisations to ensure research and tech solutions are of practical and relevant use. This support is being predominantly delivered through a series of events, with attendees then invited to continue collaborating through the alliance. Each event includes a workshop element and Q&A discussion to disseminate information and increase engagement.

Activity on this element has been slow to commence, with only £2,408 of the £10,000 budget spent during Year 2. This was all for staff costs and overheads to plan the events in the programme, including identifying gaps in support, and engaging farmers to identify potential attendees and hosts. Although one on-farm workshop was delivered in Year 2, as this occurred in the last week of March the costs were not processed until the next financial year.

Although 100% of Year 2 spend on the agri-tech support went to DCC staff costs, this is understandable as the project is being delivered entirely in-house. Therefore, these are not purely administrative costs, but relate directly of the delivery of the project.

The cost for the one workshop delivered came to £1,380, with 11 outputs resulting from the event. Therefore, it cost EDDC £125.46 for each farm business who attended. This is either similar to or less than cost per attendee for workshops and training sessions delivered under other EDDC business support schemes, suggesting the workshops represent good value for money.

Outputs, Outcomes, and Impacts

Uptake of Prosper support was minimal in the first quarter of operation, as awareness of the service had yet to permeate. However, the Jan to March period saw a significant increase in referrals, bringing the numbers in line with targets for

the year. By the end of Year 2, Prosper was on track to achieve the outputs and outcomes anticipated. Progress towards outputs has been greater than outcomes, which is expected as the outcomes take longer to realise.

Output and outcome achievement thus far indicates that Prosper is successful in its delivery. High levels of take up indicate that there is good awareness of the service and that the demand for free business support in the district remains strong. More significantly, despite most of the support being delivered from January onwards, all outcomes are in line with forecasts and have recorded at least one beneficiary. This is a key indicator that the support being delivered is of sufficient quality and relevance to realise the desired effect. The fact that businesses are reporting increased productivity, job creation, and adoption of new processes and technologies shortly after receiving support demonstrates that the service provided has directly contributed to business growth.

In comparison to Exeter and Mid Devon, East Devon has seen the highest demand for support and greatest achievement towards outputs and outcomes. This can be partly attributed to the long-standing trend of higher uptake of business support in East Devon, but also the even distribution of outputs and outcomes across the four lots.

Although all lots are being delivered by the same supplier, during the procurement process each lot was assigned a budget and an associated number of outputs and outcomes. Unlike Exeter and Mid Devon, East Devon did not focus on a particular lot and allowed for a broader range of outcomes, which meant the targets more accurately reflected the natural variation in support requested.

Of the four lots, the generalist and start-up support have been more popular than the green and job creation lots. There are two explanations for this trend. The first is that businesses accessing the service without a clear support need are inclined to select the broader support offers available. A greater range of support is covered by the umbrella of 'support relating to growing your business' than 'support to reduce your carbon footprint/reach net zero', so businesses enquiring without a specific service in mind are more likely to select the former.

Secondly, the businesses most likely to seek external support are those who are struggling to continue operation or have stagnated in their growth. Taking steps to decarbonise requires time and can be costly, whilst not being perceived as urgent to business survival, so is often sidelined when businesses are struggling. Hiring additional employees is a large expense and a significant commitment for a business to take on, this support offer is only relevant to those businesses experiencing a good level of success. For these reasons, these lots are the least appealing to the type of businesses accessing Prosper.

Although all lots are being provided by the BiP/Cosmic consortium, there is little flexibility to redistribute the budget to the more popular lots. As they are paid by output or outcome achieved, each lot has a budget that corresponds to the target numbers of outputs and outcomes for that lot. Where one lot underperforms, it threatens achievement of total output numbers as the budget and targets cannot be

reassigned to another lot where demand may exceed the budget. Budget can be moved between lots, but this requires an amendment to the contract and can only be adjusted within procurement variation rules.

As the lowest performing lot is the 'job creation lot', a lot which was not requested or authorised by EDDC, there is an underspend risk in the programme unless a contract variation can be agreed. This demonstrates the importance of building flexibility into procured contracts to be agile and responsive to actual rather than perceived need. Additionally, it reiterates the need for strong and clear lines of communication between EDDC and managing organisations, as, if informed of plans for the fourth lot, EDDC would not have authorised this use of the funding.

The longer-term impacts of Prosper are yet to be seen given the limited delivery window in Year 2. Some testimonials have been produced for social media; however, no detailed case studies of beneficiaries have been shared with EDDC. As EDDC is two-steps removed from the engagement with businesses, it is reliant on the feedback provided by BIP/Cosmic to DCC to ascertain how businesses perceive the provision, little of which has been provided. It is expected that further testimonials and case studies will come forward in the next year of Prosper.

Potential applicants to EDDC's business grant schemes, such as the Innovation and Resilience Fund Round 3 (IRF), were directed towards Prosper to get support with their applications. BiP also supported the marketing of the IRF3 by promoting it on their social media and informing beneficiaries of the offer. Although generating additional or higher quality applications to grant schemes was not a reason for funding a business support programme, it is a potential, unanticipated positive impact of Prosper. This benefit was not realised in Year 2 as few applicants cited BiP as their source of referral and none of those were successful in receiving funding.

The agri-tech support element only reports against the single output of businesses supported, of which 13 were recorded against a target of 60 across all years of the programme. This is in line with the targets set and they are forecasting achievement of all outputs. With little in-year activity and the only workshop taking place in the last week of March, no impacts have been reported so far. Furthermore, as no outcomes were set against the agri-tech support element, there is no quantitative way for EDDC to monitor impact.

Whilst there were 26 out of a possible 30 attendees at the workshop, only 11 were East Devon based farmers and therefore eligible to be counted as outputs. The remaining attendees included farmers from other districts and agricultural and ecological consultants. East Devon farmers are given priority, with others permitted to attend when maximum capacity has not been reached. As this policy is consistent across districts, East Devon farmers have been able to benefit from events held elsewhere in the county, with the other 2 outputs coming from a Mid Devon event.

As the costs of the events are fixed ahead of time and are not dependent on the number of attendees, there are no costs incurred to EDDC for the additional attendees. However, there is a benefit to their attendance as they can share their

knowledge and provide networking opportunities for East Devon farmers, which justifies their attendance at the workshops.

Evaluation Summary

Key Question	Response
1. Was the project effective?	The high take-up of support and the achievement of outputs and outcomes in line with targets indicates that the programme has been effective at providing generalist business support and helping businesses to grow.
2. Was the process of implementation efficient?	There were inefficiencies in the implementation process, particularly in delays caused by differences in expectation and lapses in clear communication between EDDC and DCC. Furthermore, navigating the three Investment Plans and differing support requirements added complexity to the contract negotiation period.
3. Did the project provide good value for money?	The administrative costs are higher than originally forecast due to fewer districts than anticipated participating in the programme. This reduces the benefit realised through economies of scale. However, the procured service provides value for money as the supplier is paid per output/outcome, incentivising effective delivery.
4. Did the project provide additionality?	The Business Support Programme enables the continuation of a free, generalist support service that would have otherwise ended with EU funding. There is no comparable service available to East Devon businesses.
5. Did the project align with the strategic ambitions set out in the UKSPF Investment Plan?	The project as delivered is strongly aligned, but not identical to, the proposal included in the Investment Plan. It meets the strategic ambition of stimulating business growth and entrepreneurship to close the productivity gap between East Devon and national averages, as demonstrated through the outcomes realised.

Lessons Learnt

- Ensure delivery partners are clear on the target outputs and outcomes from the outset of negotiations and that they align with those set by EDDC.
- Project should be delivered at the most appropriate level, with management and oversight of generalist support programmes often more suited to upper tier authorities.
- The more general and open the business support offer is, the more popular it will be amongst those seeking support, so a larger budget should be assigned to this type of support.
- For procured services, budget flexibility between lots or support elements is crucial to provide a service that is responsive to actual need and can fully spend its allocation.
- All target outputs set should have a corresponding outcome to enable the impact of activities undertaken to be measured and evaluated.

- Greater consideration is required for how impact can be measured beyond the outputs and outcomes set by MHCLG to ensure EDDC's aims are being met by funded programmes. This could include requested case studies or facilitating meetings with beneficiaries.

Council for Voluntary Service Year 2 Evaluation

Project Lead	Joanne Avery
Intervention	Intervention: E11 Capacity building & infrastructure support local groups
Total Allocation	£180,000
Year 2 Allocation	£60,000
Year 2 Spend	£60,000

Output	Target (across 3 years)	Achieved (in Year 2)
Number of amenities/facilities created or improved	5	0
Number of organisations receiving non-financial support	100	63
Number of Tourism, Culture or Heritage assets created or improved	5	0
Number of people attending training sessions	50	116
Outcome	Target (across 3 years)	Achieved (in Year 2)
Improved engagement numbers	50	129

Year 2 Activity

With Year 1 activity on the East Devon Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) dedicated to the procurement of the service, Year 2 marked the commencement of delivery by Devon Communities Together (DCT). Establishment of the CVS involved raising awareness of the provision amongst community organisations, delivery of the first training modules, and fielding enquiries via a dedicated inbox. All activities carried out by the CVS originate from their Theory of Change, which connects all actions to the outputs and outcomes set forth in the specification. These are undertaken with the stated end goal of 'VCSE organisations in East Devon are better equipped (i.e. resourced and connected) to better achieve their purpose'.

DCT's first action was to hold a series of 'listening events' where the team consulted with VCSE representatives across the district to determine their needs and priorities. The first four events successfully engaged 31 representatives and gave DCT a clear steer on four key areas where additional support was required. However, when four further sessions were organised later in the year, attendance was far lower, with one event attracting only one participant.

Raising awareness of the CVS has been a core driver of Year 2 activity. To this end, DCT have regularly attended meetings of existing partnerships, such as the Seaton VCSE Meetings, to introduce themselves to the sector. Additionally, they have held surgeries; drop-in sessions where they meet informally with community groups to better understand their needs. The new service has been heavily promoted via social

media, including takeovers of EDDC accounts to spread their message to a wider audience.

One-to-One Support

Support provided by the CVS involves a training course catalogue, one-to-one support, and facilitation of partnership groups. The first point of contact for any organisation requesting assistance is to email the dedicated inbox DCT set up for the programme. From there, organisations are either signposted towards relevant support programmes, training, or receive personalised support from DCT. DCT also engage organisations through their community outreach, such as attendance at events, where they identify potential beneficiaries.

From these initial conversations and email exchanges, DCT provided more intensive one-to-one support for 31 organisations. This involved meeting with organisations to further understand their operations and the types of support required. DCT then provided the organisations with tailored information, such as links to funding services, and referrals to training, similar organisations, and other support providers who could assist. The support offered is not time-bound, so DCT will provide follow-on support as needed, such as reviewing funding applications or completing business plans.

This bespoke support provision is a crucial element of effective delivery of a CVS. Whilst training and signposting can be useful tools, only one-to-one support is responsive to the unique situation and challenges of each organisation. For example, in the case of Exmouth Stroke Survivors, they had a negative experience with one of the organisations DCT initially recommended they contact regarding partnership working.

By establishing an ongoing dialogue, DCT were able to suggest alternatives and take an action to contact the other organisation to better understand the challenges they faced in delivering an effective service. The value of this type of support to both beneficiaries and DCT's understanding of the sector is far greater than general and broadcasted advice.

Training

From January to March 2024, 22 training sessions were held, ranging from topics such as governance to volunteer management. Although 81 attendees were recorded across the sessions, this equates to an average of three to four attendees for each module, and three events recorded just one participant.

It is important to note that seven of the training courses listed come under the 'Enterprising Halls' programme, a series of workshops available to village halls across Devon. Spaces on this programme were offered to all East Devon Halls for free against a typical cost of £50 for DCT members and £100 for non-members. As these training sessions attracted more participants than shown in the report and were not funded by the CVS, they should be excluded from any analysis of participation numbers in a value for money assessment.

However, low attendance for the training sessions was recorded across the board, not just for the Enterprising Halls sessions. Although the topics were determined by research conducted via the listening events, the courses failed to attract participants. Each training session has a fixed cost to EDDC regardless of attendee numbers, as costs are determined by staff time and mileage rather than claimed per output. Therefore, poor value for money was demonstrated in delivery of the training courses in Year 2.

As the CVS is still in its infancy and has yet to embed itself in the East Devon VCSE sector, the low attendance at both the second round of listening events and the training could be a result of a lack of awareness regarding the provision. If this is the driving factor, an increase in attendance should result in Year 3 activity as the CVS embeds further within the sector. However, there is also a possibility that the courses covered are not appealing to community organisations and that they fail to address the needs of the sector. Although topic ideas were generated through listening events, it does not follow that there was broad demand for these courses and a large audience poised to take up the opportunity.

Additionally, with such a long list of courses delivered in just three months, community organisations may have felt overwhelmed by the trainings advertised and had to prioritise their attendance. In future years of delivery, the CVS should do further market research prior to the design of the course catalogue to ensure there is sufficient demand and that similar offers are not available from alternative providers. The training programme should also be delivered over a longer time scale.

An extended time scale will allow the CVS to be more agile and responsive in providing training and adjusting sessions based on feedback received. It also provides more time to market courses, and to cancel or postpone sessions where there is little to no take up. If additional awareness raising and marketing fails to generate greater attendance, DCT should look to radically rethink their training provision and identify the reasoning behind low participation numbers.

Facilitation of Cross-Sector Partnerships

Creating a body which could unite the VCSE sector and coordinate a response to emergency situations – such as the pandemic or the war in Ukraine – was a core rationale for funding a CVS. The primary method by which DCT has worked towards this aim is to take over the operation of the East Devon pages on Devon Connect.

Devon Connect is an online platform that is used by community groups across Devon to share or find information about activities and volunteering opportunities. It also serves as a social networking platform where users can set up private groups to chat and share information. DCT have set up three teams on the platform as part of the CVS work, including the 'East Devon VCSE Network' which currently stands at 6 members.

Whilst DCT has started to adopt the role of sector co-ordinator, it is clear that further work needs to be done to achieve this aim. Although they have attended meetings of other partnership groups, such as the Seaton VCSE group, they have not yet demonstrated a clear ability to unite the sector to deliver a coordinated campaign.

However, although this is a fundamental goal of the CVS, it requires more time to achieve than running training sessions as DCT first need to establish themselves and build trust and respect amongst existing groups.

Outputs, Outcomes, and Impacts

Devon Communities Together report against two sets of outputs and outcomes on a quarterly basis. In addition to the mandated UKSPF outputs, they provide data on how many organisations received specific types of support and the mechanism by which this support was delivered. Whilst the UKSPF outputs and outcomes only capture the 'number of people engaged' and the 'number of people attending training sessions', reporting on the supplementary targets creates a clearer picture of the impact of the CVS.

For example, DCT report on the 'number of organisations helped to apply for funding'. Of the 127 organisations engaged by DCT in Year 2, 29 of those were supported to apply for funding, of which eight received one-to-one support and the remainder attended relevant training sessions. This in-depth reporting helps to overcome a flaw in the UKSPF's prioritisation of quantitative over qualitative metrics. The generic nature of 'engagement' and the breadth of activity which can count against that output means that intensive, personalised support carries the same weight as an email correspondence.

Despite the low attendance at the training sessions, DCT have made good progress towards their outputs and outcomes, with three out of five exceeded in Year 2. The large number of training sessions offered, along with a multi-faceted approach to engaging with organisations, has enabled them to reach a high number of organisations, even where take-up of a particular provision is low.

For two measures – the number of facilities/amenities created and/or improved and the number of Tourism, Culture or Heritage assets created or improved – DCT has been unable to claim any outputs. Although DCT did report numbers against these targets, they were not compliant with the definitions provided by government and therefore could not be counted. As the outputs requires capital upgrades to be implemented as a direct result of support offered, it may be challenging for DCT to meet these outputs.

This highlights the importance of ensuring contracted delivery partners have sight of the output and outcome definitions at the outset of the process and can work collaboratively to ensure all outputs are accurately recorded. As DCT has a clear methodology underlying all activity related to the CVS, this oversight is likely related to the piecemeal release of government information regarding the definitions of outputs and doesn't undermine the strength of delivery in other areas.

The true impact and value of the CVS is most clearly demonstrated in the qualitative feedback provided. This includes quotes from those attending training and case studies focuses on those organisations receiving higher levels of support. By illustrating how the provision has been beneficial to the operations of community organisations, the value of the service to East Devon's VCSE sector is far clearer than participant numbers can demonstrate.

DCT's impact as a coordinator of the VCSE sector has been limited in Year 2, although this is to be expected in the early phases of delivery. This should be carefully monitored in further years of the CVS to ensure this aim remains a central focus and that reports received from DCT demonstrate progress towards this goal.

Evaluation Summary

Key Question	Response
1. Was the project effective?	The approach taken by DCT has been effective in implementing intensive support to community organisations and raising the profile of the CVS. However, its efficacy in attracting participants to training and drop-in sessions has been far lower.
2. Was the process of implementation efficient?	The high number of activities undertaken compared to the low attendance numbers show that the implementation of the CVS was overly time intensive for the outputs produced.
3. Did the project provide good value for money?	Fixed costs are incurred regardless of outputs achieved, so where take up was low (such as training and listening events), good value for money was not realised. However, at this stage it is too early to make a final assessment on value for money of the whole project.
4. Did the project provide additionality?	The CVS itself provides additionality as it is the only overarching provision in East Devon, although there are more localised groups such as Seaton VCSE already uniting community groups. There is some overlap with training courses offered under the UKSPF Cultural Programme, although those are sector specific opportunities.
5. Did the project align with the strategic ambitions set out in the UKSPF Investment Plan?	The project aligns with the challenge of 'disjointed VCSE coordination' identified in the UKSPF Investment Plan through the creation of a CVS. It also addresses the second strategic objective in the Poverty Strategy to support community and voluntary groups working to combat poverty.

Lessons Learnt

- Ensure all Managing Organisations contracted to deliver a service have the definitions of each output and outcome and confirm reporting is aligned with these definitions.
- Place thresholds on required outputs/attendee numbers for events and sessions funded through UKSPF to allow for postponement or cancellation where these do not represent good value for money.
- Consider awarding grant funding on a per output basis to incentivise the managing organisation to maximise uptake of support offers.
- Provision of longer-term funding is necessary for support offers established through UKSPF funding to ensure there is sufficient time to the raise awareness and build the trust and rapport needed to realise the broader outcomes.

- Include a requirement to report on how funding awarded is being utilised by Managing Organisations across the activities carried out to enable a robust value for money assessment.

Culture, Leisure, and Tourism Fund Evaluation

Project Lead	Joanne Avery	
Intervention	E17: Funding for the development and promotion (both trade and consumer) of the visitor economy, such as local attractions, trails, tours, and tourism products more generally. 1.2 Funding (capital grants) for growing the local social economy and supporting innovation.	
Project	Sustainable Tourism Fund	Supporting Rural Communities (REPF)
Total Original Allocation	£209,553	£427,000
Year 2 Allocation to the CLTF	£71,725	£106,787
Year 2 Spend to the CLTF	£64,149	£117,448

Background

The Culture, Leisure, and Tourism Fund (CLTF) was a grant scheme delivered in Year 2 of EDDC's UKSPF Programme. It was designed to support community organisations and tourism businesses with capital funding to promote decarbonisation and improved accessibility and was the first scheme run by EDDC with this focus. The CLTF distributed a total of £181,597, with £117,448 coming from the Supporting Rural Communities REPF intervention and £64,149 from the Sustainable Tourism Fund.

EDDC's Tourism Strategy highlighted sustainability and accessibility as two of the core values of its vision. This led to the development of the fourth key strategic objective: 'to actively support tourism businesses to reduce carbon usage and improve accessibility'. The Strategy identified the UKSPF allocation as a method of implementing a proposed Sustainable Tourism Fund to provide active support to the sector to decarbonise and improve accessibility practices. The proposal for a capital grant scheme for the tourism industry to purchase decarbonisation and sustainability equipment was included as a project to be funded through the Sustainable Tourism Programme in the UKSPF Investment Plan.

When the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) 'top-up' was announced, EDDC sought opportunities to align the funding with existing schemes. With rising energy costs presenting as a major concern and decarbonisation serving as a core aim of the Investment Plan, a grant scheme supporting community organisations to decarbonise was included within the REPF Addendum as an apt use of the funding. As the Investment Plan also emphasised the importance of supporting the culture and leisure sectors, the grant scheme was directed at organisations with those focal points. This created a strong alignment between the REPF intervention and the Sustainable Tourism Fund so the two schemes were merged to form the CLTF.

Policy and Scheme Design

The development of the Culture, Leisure and Tourism Fund was a collaborative effort by the Project Lead, the Cultural Producer, and the Senior Economic Development Officer in her role as sustainable tourism lead. They each provided a different perspective and area of expertise and worked in partnership to deliver the CLTF.

The first stage involved in the delivery of the Culture, Leisure, and Tourism Fund was to design a policy for the grant scheme. There were two pathways under which applicants could apply for funding: the Rural Culture and Leisure (RCL) Pathway and the Sustainable Tourism (ST) Pathway. The different pathways related to the funding pots available, with the RCL funding coming from the REPF and the ST from the Sustainable Tourism Programme. Each pathway had a distinct set of criteria and applicants could only apply under one pathway.

The Rural Culture and Leisure Pathway provided grants between £2,500 and £20,000 to community organisations to purchase decarbonisation equipment. All applicants had to have a clear cultural or leisure focus, provide a minimum of 10% match funding, and be based in a 'rural' (as designated by DEFRA) part of East Devon. Under the Sustainable Tourism Pathway, tourism businesses could apply for up to £5,000 for either decarbonisation equipment or equipment to improve accessibility beyond statutory requirements. 50% match funding was required to align with the Investment Plan commitment to leverage 50% private investment from business grants.

The pathway approach created some confusion amongst applicants and made it difficult to market the scheme. As there were different funding amounts available, variety in what equipment could be purchased, and specific policy points for each pathway, the CLTF lacked a clear message that was easily communicable to prospective applicants. Although there is no evidence to suggest that this had a significant detrimental impact on the overall number or quality of applications to the scheme, there were some negative impacts realised through this approach.

Firstly, there were some applicants who were eligible under both pathways, such as charities with trading arms, Community Interest Companies, and social enterprises. However, the RCL pathway provided more favourable terms due to the higher amount available and the lower match commitment, so should've been selected by these applicants. As the applicant was responsible for selecting the pathway, there were cases where they did not select the most appropriate route.

Secondly, the complexity of the messaging may have contributed to the lower number of applications to the accessibility strand of the ST pathway which received only two applications. As improving sustainability and accessibility are given parity in the Tourism Strategy, the grants were intended to incentivise uptake of both measures. However, despite providing additional resources, such as a list of accessibility equipment supplied by Accessibility and Inclusion UK, and targeting engagement with tourism businesses, interest was low. As the central messaging for the CLTF emphasised decarbonisation equipment as the focus, the option to apply for accessibility equipment may have been lost on prospective applicants.

Furthermore, whilst the financial benefits of decarbonisation are well publicised and are immediately noticeable to business owners, this is not the case for improved accessibility. Although Visit Britain estimates that tourism expenditure in England by those with an impairment and their travel companions has an annual value of £14.6 billion, the loss of potential income from this group is not as visible as increased costs associated with energy bills. Therefore, as the less appealing grant offer, it is unsurprising that applicants applied for decarbonisation equipment when given the choice.

Two elements of the Policy were amended whilst the scheme was live in response to applicant feedback. The first was a change to the eligibility criterion that required RCL applicants to have 28 years left on their lease, which was reduced to 10 years. The length of the lease was proving prohibitive to applicants as community organisations seldom own the buildings from which they operate. There was found to be no solid rationale behind the 28-year requirement, which had been taken from a previous scheme. This change led to two additional successful applications.

The second adjustment was to permit quotes to be submitted via email after the deadline had passed, provided a full application had been submitted via Firmstep. This was altered due to applicants struggling to obtain two quotes within the time frame provided. Although this change enabled several organisations to apply successfully, it created an extra administrative burden on the delivery team. As the quotes were received via email and the Firmstep application could not be updated to include this additional information, information regarding applications was split into two locations. This posed a particular problem where subsequent quotes were cheaper and the amounts requested needed to be amended, which also had an implication on the 'value' and 'local' categories of the scoring.

This meant a lot of last-minute updates needed to be completed and double checking to ensure all spreadsheets and systems reflected the new scores and amounts. For future schemes careful consideration should be given to enabling the submissions of quotes via email and ensure there is sufficient time to accommodate these requests. Alternative approaches, such as ensuring local suppliers are aware of upcoming schemes and emphasising the need to source two quotes in marketing, should be used in the first instance to reduce the numbers of applicants needing to submit late quotes.

Overall, the flexibility in amending the policy in response to feedback from potential applicants strengthened the project as it enabled further strong applications to come forward and demonstrated a responsiveness and willingness to change from the council. However, future grant schemes should seek to include this learning into future policies to remove the need for amendment.

Applications, Appraisal, and Award

Applications were made via Firmstep. The short form was developed in-house and requested information on the proposed project, forecast carbon savings, and demonstration of value for money. Using Firmstep provided a simple and accessible way for organisations to apply, however the limited ability within the Council to create

and amend these forms should be noted as a potential issue for future schemes looking to replicate this process.

All applications were scored separately by two appraisers who then came together to agree a joint score. This was an effective and thorough way to review the applications as each appraiser brought a different perspective and identified alternative strengths and weaknesses of the bids. The use of Firmstep to record the scores proved less efficient as they could not be adjusted once submitted, which was needed for moderation and account for late quotes. Instead, scores were recorded on Excel.

For each pathway the projects were ordered by score and presented to the UKSPF Programme Management Panel alongside a brief description and a recommendation for approval or rejection. For the RCL pathway, the Panel approved the highest scoring applications as recommended by officers. As there were more applications recommended for approval than funding available, this meant some suitable and high scoring projects did not receive panel consideration. In the future, all applications recommended for approval should be discussed in the panel meetings to ensure parity in treatment and full exercise of the Panel's oversight function.

The similarities in scores awarded across the RCL pathway and the closeness between applicants who did and did not receive funding was likely due to the simplicity of the projects, rather than the strengths of the applications. Most responses were short, and many of the carbon savings estimated were of poor quality. This suggests that future decarbonisation grant schemes could explore alternative methods of allocating funding that would be more equitable. These options could include targeting a specific cohort – such as village halls or museums – of a limited number and awarding them all a set amount or scoring applications solely on amount of carbon saved and distributing funding to those with the highest demonstratable return on investment.

The review process contained some inefficiencies as there were several instances of duplicate data entry. Before switching to solely using Excel, all scores from Excel spreadsheets were also being entered into Firmstep. When compiling the report, project descriptions had to be taken from Firmstep, amended where applicable, with scores, comments, and costs all needing to be copied from different sources. This was time intensive and duplicated work already done to record these elsewhere. Future schemes should identify options for automation of this process to enable quicker production of reports.

Additionally, inbox management could have been streamlined. Without a clear process in place for managing queries, there were often delays in responding to applicants. Projects with more than one officer playing a significant role in delivery should assign responsibilities for all tasks to avoid confusion and make best use of officer time.

All eligible applications under the Sustainable Tourism pathway were recommended for approval, with the total requested by those projects falling £883 short of the full amount available. The three applications received from holiday lets were heavily

scrutinised by the Panel due to the risk involved that they would be converted back to residential housing, with one application rejected on these grounds. One further applicant had their grant offer rescinded after they professed a desire to sell the property in the near future, demonstrating the validity of this concern.

The eligibility of holiday lets was debated at the policy design stage as the lack of regulation within the industry makes it hard to distinguish genuine hospitality businesses from second homes being let out on a temporary basis. However, excluding holiday lets entirely would've prevented a significant number of businesses from applying and undermined EDDC's commitment to support the sector. Therefore, holiday lets were allowed, but had to be registered as a business on Companies House to qualify. As this requirement did not successfully filter out applicants looking to sell, future policies should be stricter on holiday lets, with options explored to include conditions preventing sale for a set period in the Grant Agreement.

Due to these projects not receiving funding, there was an underspend in the Sustainable Tourism pathway. The option to reallocate this funding to high scoring projects submitted under the RCL pathway was debated in the Panel meeting. However, as the funding came from different pots and was allocated to support different sectors and types of organisation, the funding was instead returned to the Sustainable Tourism Programme. The exception to this was the £3,307 awarded to Fairlynch Museum to make up the shortfall from the remaining funds in the RCL pot. This was agreed as the museum serves as a tourist attraction.

Outputs, Outcomes, and Impacts

As only one round of progress reporting has been carried out for the CLTF, the full outcomes and impacts of the fund are yet to be realised. However, the initial findings highlight some lessons for the design of Year 3 decarbonisation grants and further monitoring rounds.

For both pathways, the number of organisations/businesses receiving grants was just under half the target. As this activity is planned to continue into Year 3, this means the outputs are on track to achieve their target. However, as the underspend in the Sustainable Tourism Fund was sufficient to support an additional business, it should have reached the 50% threshold in Year 2.

Feedback provided from businesses who expressed an interest in the scheme but did not submit an application indicates that the ST pathway offer was not attractive enough to produce a significant response. The combination of a £5,000 maximum grant award and the 50% match funding requirement was not sufficient to motivate businesses to complete an application, particularly during the height of tourist season. The average request from the Sustainable Tourism Fund was close to the maximum amount at £4,355, whilst the average awarded from the RCL pathway was closer the middle at £13,417. This suggests that larger grants are required when funding decarbonisation costs.

As found with other UKSPF projects, there was some incompatibility between the scheme design and the outputs and outcomes selected. Although improved perceptions of facilities and amenities was selected as an outcome, this was not a

core aim of the CLTF. Whilst some projects did lead to perceptible improvements – such as warmer buildings and better facilities for disabled users – this was not the case for many applications. Whilst greater energy efficiency and lower electricity bills represents an improvement to a facility, it is unlikely to alter a user’s perspective on the building. Given the focus on decarbonisation, measurement of carbon savings would have been a more appropriate outcome.

Despite its exclusion from the outputs and outcomes reporting, the amount of carbon saved is being measured and monitored as part of the CLTF. In initial feedback provided by prospective applicants, a lack of knowledge regarding the most suitable decarbonisation equipment to apply for was highlighted as an issue in submitting applications. This was reflected in the poor quality of responses to questions regarding carbon savings.

In the first round of monitoring, the accuracy of data provided in relation to carbon reduction was variable and highly dependent upon the equipment purchased. For example, whilst some solar panels have inbuilt software which provides the user with data on the carbon saved, there is no such data capture system provided with LED lighting. Therefore, some recipients could pass on pre-generated figures, whilst others produced their own calculations.

Future decarbonisation schemes need to offer support to recipients throughout the process to demonstrate the greatest return on investment for carbon savings. This includes pre-application advice on the type of equipment to provide and training to report back the reductions in line with certain standards. Counting the carbon reductions generated by grants issued by EDDC against our own emissions requires us to verify that figures reported adhere to the same protocols as we use to track our footprint. This represents a significant challenge that requires collaborative work between departments in EDDC and external expertise.

The process for monitoring the CLTF projects was heavily influenced by the Innovation and Resilience Fund, which highlighted some key differences between in decarbonisation schemes and more generalised business grants. Firstly, over half the projects were completed by the first reporting round, compared to just one in IRF3. CLTF projects tended to be simpler to deliver, with only one piece of equipment purchased and installed. Most of the uncompleted projects were yet to commence by this point.

With more grant schemes going live in Year 3, all of which will require monitoring, it is a huge administrative time saving to fund projects which don’t require ongoing reporting. Future decarbonisation grant schemes could further reduce the monitoring time by shortening the length of time allocated to complete the project in the grant agreements to a year to motivate applicants to commence projects as soon as possible.

On the other hand, the six-month gap between the project end and the final Completion Report used for IRF is not sufficient for decarbonisation schemes. As carbon savings will fluctuate seasonally, a full year of data is required to robustly

measure emissions data. In future schemes, final reports should be set at a year from the project completion date.

Finally, the policy restriction only applying for a single item of decarbonisation equipment led to a greater risk of underspend than in the IRF. Although two quotes had to be provided at the application stage, in several cases the actual cost was lower than forecast, resulting in either minor underspends or smaller match commitments. Whilst the policy and the grant agreement are clear that funding must be returned in these situations, the recovery of minimal amounts could be more costly and reputationally damaging than allowing the retention of funds, particularly where the underspend solely relates to the amount of match committed. In the policy design stage of future rounds, careful consideration should be given as to how these situations will be approached and the most appropriate course of action.

Evaluation Summary

Key Question	Response
1. Was the project effective?	The CLTF was effective at providing support to community organisations and tourism businesses to decarbonise and following the action plan laid out in the Tourism Strategy. It was less effective at promoting accessibility and quantifying the benefits realised from the grants. Qualitative benefits not captured through the monitoring process are too early to determine at this stage.
2. Was the process of implementation efficient?	The adaption of existing policies and documents enabled the grant scheme to be set up efficiently. However, there was a significant amount of time dedicated to duplicating data entry and some occasions where roles and responsibilities needed to be defined more clearly for efficient working.
3. Did the project provide good value for money?	All applications were scored on value for money and needed to provide two quotes. The match amounts committed exceeded the minimum required, demonstrating the leverage of additional investment. Evaluation upon project completion on the return on investment for carbon saved will be required to demonstrate full value for money.
4. Did the project provide additionality?	There were no similar grant schemes available for either businesses or organisations at the time the scheme was run. With EDDCs Small Community Grants on hold, the CLTF provided a needed funding boost to community organisations.
5. Did the project align with the strategic ambitions set out in the UKSPF Investment Plan?	There was strong alignment with the Investment Plan and the priorities to support decarbonisation and culture, leisure, and tourism. It linked to the strategic objectives and actions in the Tourism Strategy and supported EDDCs Climate Change Strategy. There were weaker links to the Cultural Strategy, Theme 2 of which is 'protect and enhance the natural environment'.

Lessons Learnt

- Decarbonisation support for businesses and organisations needs to be broader than just capital funding to maximise and accurately record the return on investment. Engagement with specialists both inside and outside EDDC is necessary to obtain quality data and sense check applications.
- Advertising upcoming schemes to local suppliers could assist in overcoming issues obtaining two quotes for decarbonisation equipment and increase local purchasing.
- The fund design should be simplified as much as possible to minimise confusion for applicants and create clear marketing messaging.
- Scheme design should centre on a single purpose and have a narrow and specific area of focus.
- Grant schemes designed to primarily drive measures of social value to an organisation or business require greater financial incentives than those with a clear monetary benefit to the recipient.
- Fund design should create a 'golden thread' between the purpose, policy, application form, and monitoring process to ensure the outcomes recorded relate back to the original aims.
- The timings of grant schemes should take into consideration the busier times of the sectors targeted.
- All maximum grant requests and match funding requirements need to be sufficiently attractive to unlock quality applications.
- Flexibility in adapting the policy whilst grants are live in response to feedback from prospective applicants can strengthen the scheme and increase take-up.
- Clear governance and assignation of tasks and responsibilities is required for successful delivery of UKSPF projects with multiple leads.

East Devon Cultural Programme Year 2 Evaluation

Project Lead	Sarah Elghady	
Intervention	E6: Support for local arts, cultural, heritage and creative activities	
Total Allocation	£95,000	
Year 2 Allocation (Original)	£35,000	
Year 2 Allocation (Revised)	£42,469	
Year 2 Spend	£42,317.39	
Output	Target (across 3 years)	Achieved (until Y2 End)
Number of local events or activities supported	17	17
Number of organisations receiving grants	17	16
Number of organisations receiving non-financial support	17	102
Number of volunteering opportunities supported	50	88
Number of people attending training sessions	150	132
Outcome		
Improved engagement numbers	150	2
Improved perception of facilities/amenities	100	0
Number of community-led arts, cultural, heritage and creative programmes as a result of support	1	1
Increased visitor numbers	100	0

Year 2 Activity

In Year 2, the Cultural Programme predominantly focused on two activities; the continued support for and development of the Arts and Culture East Devon (ACED) network through the launch of the ACED website, meetings and training, and the launch of the Creative East Devon Fund grant scheme.

Arts and Culture East Devon

The Arts and Culture East Devon (ACED) network saw considerable growth in Year 2, expanding its membership from 71 in July 2023 to 150 in March 2024. EDDC continued to provide support to the network through running meetings three times a year, providing free training opportunities, and recruiting new ACED Champions and mentors. Network meetings took place at the Gateway Theatre (Seaton), Manor Pavilion Theatre (Sidmouth) and Thelma Hulbert Gallery (Honiton), venues were spread across the district to maximise engagement.

The increase in membership can be somewhat attributed to the launch of the Creative East Devon Fund, which was exclusively open to ACED members. Whilst a positive tool for growing the network, it also led to a small number of membership applications from organisations unconnected to arts, culture, or heritage seeking to access funding. As all membership requests are reviewed, this had little impact on the integrity of the network as these applications were not approved.

As the network has expanded, EDDC has made a conscious effort to ensure the grassroots community organisations who comprise ACED have maintained a good degree of ownership and involvement. One change made to facilitate this was to appoint an ACED Champion as the co-chair of each network meeting. Each ACED Champion, six more of whom were recruited in Year 2, has a specialist area, including artistic disciplines such as theatre and themes like climate change. Through co-chairing the meetings, the Champions have greater control over the agenda and the opportunity to share knowledge and events related to their specialisms.

It is vital to the future of the network that members take an active role in its work and governance. This is key to ensuring it is responsive to the needs and creative aspirations of the cultural sector in East Devon. The network needs to be for the community by the community, with the Council engaging and enabling, rather than leading. Successful delivery of the Cultural Strategy is reliant on participation from cultural organisations and to dedicate time and resource to the network requires a sense of ownership that cannot be attained through a top-down approach.

The launch of the ACED website in July 2023 assisted in the separation between ACED and EDDC activity by creating a separate site for the network to access. The ACED website serves as the home of the ACED member directory, publicises opportunities for grant funding and collaboration, and shares information regarding the Creative East Devon Grant Fund. Although paid for and maintained by EDDC, the branding and design are aligned with the Cultural Strategy and ACED network, rather than EDDC's corporate branding. This clearly identifies it as a space belonging to ACED rather than EDDC.

ACED Training

Twelve different training sessions were made available for ACED members in Year 2. These included Digital Marketing, Volunteer Recruitment and Retention, Marketing, Carbon Literacy Training, and Collections Management.

All training opportunities were fully funded, with some taking place in person and others online. Surveys undertaken of the ACED network were used to determine the most requested training topics and whether there was a clear preference for in-person or online sessions.

Just over half the training sessions were held online, which proved a more cost-effective way of delivering due to the removal of room hire fees and travel expenses for trainers outside of the district. However, five sessions were delivered in person, depending on both the subject matter and the demand from network members. The

surveys conducted did show an appetite for in-person training, which was supported by the fact that the three best attended sessions were all in-person.

Whilst attendance varied across the training held, most sessions attracted at least ten participants and had a higher average attendance than those held in Year 1. The maximum number of spaces available varied, but in general, trainers restricted numbers to the mid-teens to ensure quality provision and a higher level of engagement. This puts the actual attendee number close to the target numbers across most of the sessions delivered. With an average cost per head of £30, the delivery of training was a low-cost way to support the ACED network and upskill cultural organisations across the district. In total 134 individuals benefitted from free ACED training in Year 2,

To support the evaluation process, attendees were asked to rate the quality of the training provided and how relevant it was to their work. Of the responses provided, positive feedback was given across the board, with all strongly or mostly agreeing that the training was relevant, of a high standard, and improved their knowledge and understanding. Testimonials from beneficiaries described training given as 'informative, clear, and useful', 'pitched at just the right level', and described the trainers selected as 'very experienced and knowledgeable.

Creative East Devon Fund

With an allocated budget of £25,000, the Creative East Devon Fund represented the majority of Year 2 Spend. The fund was designed to provide small grants to cultural projects and events occurring December 2023 and March 2024. The CEDF was exclusively available to ACED members, who could apply for grant amounts between £500 and £3,000. Although there was a 10% match requirement, in-kind contributions were accepted as match funding to align with the needs of potential applicants.

The Creative East Devon Fund is the first grant scheme run by EDDC with an explicit focus on supporting arts and culture organisations and activities. Although they have been eligible to apply to previous grant schemes, and the Culture, Leisure, and Tourism Fund was specifically targeted at the culture sector, the activities funded did not relate to culture and creativity. This meant the scheme was designed to specifically address the needs of cultural organisations and remove common barriers experiences by those groups.

The policy was non-prescriptive in the activities the fund could support, with applications welcomed across artistic disciplines and types of cultural organisations. The main requirement for applications was the demonstration of alignment with the East Devon Cultural Strategy and the 'celebration of everyday creativity'. This could include support for cultural events, specific initiatives for young adults, the transformation of underused spaces into arts venues, or the use of art to tackle the climate emergency.

Applications for the CEDF had to be submitted by mid-November, with all projects fully complete by the end of Year 2. This timeline presented a challenge to potential applicants, as many cultural events – such as festivals – are held during the summer

months. Furthermore, the second round of CEDF was planned for summer 2024, creating a gap in grant provision. As some events are annual and operate on fixed schedules, organisations could not adjust the dates of their activity to comply with the grant deadlines.

To overcome these challenges, a small number of projects were permitted extensions to their delivery window, enabling the majority of activity to conclude within Year 2 whilst providing the necessary flexibility. In future, should funding allow, the intention is to keep the CEDF application window open year round, with applications appraised and approved on a quarterly or biannual basis remove any restrictions on time-bound projects from applying.

However, there was also a clear benefit to making grants available during the winter months as a method of incentivising cultural activity during the low season. It incentivised the development of projects specific to that time of year, such as the Winter Lights Festival, and for organisers to schedule activities in the winter months where they could be flexible on timing.

There was a high level of demand for the CEDF, with the 22 applications made requesting a total of £51,119. The amounts requested spanned the range of funding available, with 10 requesting the full £3,000. Although the high number applying for the full amount suggests that there may be scope to increase the maximum grant amount, no feedback from potential applicants suggested that a larger grant maximum was desired.

All applications received were reviewed by two officers and scored against creative engagement, link to the Cultural Strategy, deliverability, value for money, and public benefit. Additionally, all applications requesting £1,500 or above were required to meet at least one UKSPF output or outcome and provide information on how they would measure and evidence its achievement. Once all projects had been appraised and moderated, the scores and recommendations were presented to the UKSPF panel for consideration.

Due to the strength and quality of applications received, 13 projects were recommended for approval, totalling £31,585. As there was underspend elsewhere in the UKSPF programme, panel members were presented with the option to approve grant awards in excess of the £25,000 allocated and thereby approve the transfer of unspent funding from other UKSPF projects. In the end, 14 projects were successful in receiving grant funding, with £31,869 awarded.

Outside of the CEDF, EDDC have been approached by organisations seeking grant funding for small projects. One request, issued prior to the launch of the CEDF, was from the theatre company Four of Swords, who run immersive theatres schools during the summer holidays. They requested £500 in grant funding to cover the cost of two bursary places on their summer Immersive Theatre School for children from low-income families.

This request was decided outside of a grant process, with the funding authorised due to its alignment with UKSPF outputs and an agreement with Four of Swords to produce and share a monitoring report. The launch of the CEDF provided a formal

framework through which to consider future requests and ensure parity in the decision-making process. However, the option was also publicised on the ACED website that organisations could email EDDC regarding funding opportunities for any projects that did not fit within the parameters of the CEDF.

Besides Four of Swords, only one grant was approved outside of CEDF. This was a £300 contribution to 'The Melt', a travelling, floating art installation depicting changing icebergs in the Arctic due to the impacts of climate change. However, the team behind the project were unable to bring 'The Melt' to East Devon and the grant was refunded. This meant the £500 to Four of Swords was the only non-CEDF grant issued in Year 2.

The instigation of a formal grant process created a robust mechanism to process funding requests from cultural organisations. It ensured all awards were underlined by a thorough and transparent decision-making process, with involvement from elected members. Furthermore, the marketing of the CEDF publicised the opportunity to cultural and heritage organisations across the district, meaning eligible organisations were aware of the availability of funding.

Outputs and Outcomes

There was significant progress towards achievement of all the target outputs in Year 2, with all but two exceeded. The direct connection between the activities undertaken and many of the outputs, such as the provision of training and issuance of grants, facilitated this achievement. Whilst there were challenges in Year 1 with linking the planned activities with the outputs and outcomes pledged, many of these difficulties were overcome in Year 2 as activity was designed with a greater focus on output achievement.

Progress towards the outcomes was slower than achievement of outputs, with numbers reported at the end of Year 2 falling considerably short of targets. Some of this can be attributed to the longer time frame required for outcome achievement and the natural lag between meeting outputs and recording outcomes which has been consistent across all UKSPF projects.

However, the numbers reported to MHCLG at the end of Year 2 and recorded at the start of this evaluation are not an accurate representation of the outcomes achieved in the time frame. As the CEDF grant recipients had until the end of the financial year to complete their projects, their reports were not submitted in time for inclusion within the year end reporting. If those figures could have been included, outcome achievement would've been significantly increased.

One way in which the challenges in measuring outputs and outcomes were lessened was through the design of the CEDF. As most applicants had to detail in their applications which of the UKSPF outputs and outcomes they would achieve and how they would track and measure their progress, a clear line was drawn between activities funded and outputs expected. The wide range and diversity of projects funded allowed for different outputs and outcomes to be targeted to ensure the CEDF impacted all metrics.

Additionally, the recipients were more easily able to measure some of the outcomes than EDDC. For example, some events supported are run annually, so they had participation data for previous years they could use as a comparison point to demonstrate change. Measuring change has proved difficult for EDDC, as the guidance provided required bespoke surveys and access to past data. Whilst it is hugely challenging and would likely require additional budget dedicated to commissioning this data, for EDDC to measure this for cultural participation across the district, it was far simpler for funded projects to do this on a smaller scale.

Despite these improvements, there were still difficulties in reporting outputs and outcomes in line with the guidance given. Although all recipients were given the definitions and threshold required to claim an output or outcome, all responses needed sense checking to ensure they were being consistent with guidance.

Furthermore, the guidance lacks clarity in places, particularly with measuring digital engagements. Whilst digital engagements can be included under 'increased engagement', there is insufficient detail on the level of engagement required to qualify. Internally, a decision was taken to classify certain digital activity as in and out of scope to only permit deeper forms of engagement, such as watching a recorded video of activity, rather than metrics such as page views.

Thus far, the most difficult outcome to meet has been 'improved perception of facilities or amenities'. As this outcome focuses on physical infrastructure, it doesn't neatly align with either activities funded or any aims of the Cultural Strategy. Whilst the strategy mentions creating new spaces for culture, this outcome explicitly requires improvements to existing facilities. Although one CEDF funded project, the installation of new signage boards at the Gateway Theatre, did focus on improvement of an amenity, this was not typical of applications received.

One reason for this is that capital upgrades are costly, and therefore not well suited to a small grants scheme. Furthermore, the scoring matrix, which awards marks for creative engagement, wider social benefit, and strategic alignment, does not reward these types of projects. Measuring the perception of a building is also harder than perception of an activity, as there is not a fixed user group who are willing to complete feedback forms to reflect their changing opinions of a space. Many grant recipients who reported against this outcome just responded 'yes' rather than producing a figure.

Impacts

The impacts realised through the Cultural Programme paint a more detailed picture of its benefits. Through the reports provided by CEDF recipients, testimonials given in training feedback forms, and messages sent by beneficiaries to EDDC, the breadth and depth of the impact is more visible. These also demonstrate how adeptly the programme is meeting the objectives of the Cultural Strategy, which is as important a metric of success as UKSPF outputs and outcomes.

As previously mentioned, the post-training surveys demonstrate the value of the sessions to the attendees, with feedback indicating that the training delivered was useful and high quality. Additionally, surveys conducted following Year 1 fundraising

training showed that two respondents submitted successful bids for grant funding following the training. Those who respond to surveys represent a small sample of those who undergo training, which makes measuring the true extent of the impacts challenging, however this only means there may be wider benefits of which we are not aware.

The greatest impacts from the Cultural Programme were shown in the post-project reports provided by CEDF recipients. When applying, each applicant had to detail how they would meet the aims of the Cultural Strategy within the project, and the report template mirrored this by asking beneficiaries how they had met each theme within the strategy. Their responses present a comprehensive picture of how the strategic aims were met across the range of funded projects, with all demonstrating alignment with numerous themes.

One significant benefit shown by the CEDF projects was the improvement on participant's 'health, happiness, and wellbeing', in line with the second aim of the Cultural Strategy. Overwintering, a project by CIC [Tidelines](#) which invited members of the public to participate in a musical piece inspired by birds on the Exe Estuary, shared feedback such as 'I felt mentally buoyed', 'it's been a joy mentally and physically', and 'I feel calmer, more at peace, and connected to my environment'.

This response was typical of feedback received from all projects. Chhaya Youth, a dance collective who staged a performance of Ophelia with their grant, shared a testimonial from a participant saying 'I have evolved physically and mentally with your support and I am just so grateful'. Paddleboat, who ran music making classes at Mill Water Academy and the Deaf Academy, specialist educational needs schools, shared that the activity had brought out students' confidence and increased their happiness.

Another theme that was strongly represented in the CEDF projects funded was the use of culture to tackle the climate emergency. Many projects had this as an explicit focus, with Overwintering taking participants out to the Exe Estuary to listen to the birds, the Chhaya Collective partnering with environmentalist groups in Exmouth to collect beach waste to make their costumes, and the Magpies Festival of Thrift organising a week-long festival centring on promoting reuse and recycling of goods. Additionally, Sidmouth School of Art's Winter Lights Festival created art installations designed to prompt visitors to reflect on the impacts of climate change and invited them to write a message to send to local MPs with a call to action.

Furthermore, it was evident that the projects funded encouraged residents to consider work in the cultural and creative industries and supported training and employment opportunities for local creatives, in line with the fourth theme of the Cultural Strategy. This included commissioning local artists to design art installations and run workshops, but also to inspire younger residents to consider a career in the arts. Six of the fourteen funded projects had an explicit focus on working with younger people, partnering with local schools and colleges to deliver elements of their project.

The projects funded also displayed a good geographical spread across the district. Although half of the projects predominantly took place in either Sidmouth or Exmouth, funding was also distributed to smaller locations with a less established cultural presence. The 'Cranbrook Art Club Pilot' was delivered by the Youth Arts Health Trust on Cranbrook Education Campus, bringing a much-needed creative activity to the new community. One of the smallest grants was awarded to Stockland Parochial Church Council to create a display celebrating the history of the village which brought together the small community to commemorate its heritage.

Although the grants awarded did support the third strategic aim of the Cultural Strategy to increase opportunities for children and young people to participate in cultural and creative activities, this predominantly centred on children rather than young adults. The UKSPF Investment Plan highlights the importance of attracting and retaining 18–30-year-olds to live and work in East Devon to address the demographic imbalance, with an enhanced cultural offer cited as a method of achieving this aim.

The young adult age group was not solely targeted in any CEDF projects, with no reports demonstrating how this demographic had benefitted from funded activity. As the evaluation report produced by each project combined children and young adults into one age group, there are no figures available relating to how many 18–30-year-olds were supported. Although over 1,000 young people engaged with the CEDF projects, many of those participants can be assumed to be under-18 as they were counted by projects delivered in partnerships with schools.

There were likely beneficiaries from the 18-30 age group, but the level of impact cannot be known in the absence of exact numbers. For example, the 'Community Gamer' project, run by the Community Waffle House CIC, set up a programme of gaming clubs and aimed to attract those in the 8–23-year-old age range. However, their final report only mentioned that 85% of those engaged were under 30, giving no indication of how that was divided between age groups. To capture these beneficiaries, future grant reports should request a separate number for the young adult age group.

The drawback of using grants as a method of project delivery is that design of the projects is outside EDDC control. Unless applicants put forward proposals for projects targeting 18–30 year-olds, activity targeting this age group cannot be funded, although the policy and scoring matrix could be adjusted to incentivise applications with a focus on young adults. Similarly, representation of this group amongst the ACED network is dependent on young creatives opting to sign up. This demonstrates that specialist intervention by EDDC in the design of the Cultural Programme is required to create a measurable and specific impact on improving creative opportunities for this demographic.

A further benefit realised was the use of CEDF as match or seed funding, for organisations to submit larger bids. Most notably Paddleboat Theatre subsequently applied to the National Lottery Heritage Fund and were successful in receiving a grant of £101,087.

Overall, the CEDF grants had a hugely positive impact that was widespread in both the aims achieved and the location and types of beneficiaries reached. It proved an effective and low-cost way of supporting cultural organisations and delivering on both UKSPF outputs and outcomes and the themes of the Cultural Strategy.

Evaluation Summary

Key Question	Response
1. Was the project effective?	Yes, the activities supportive have been effective at growing the ACED network, expanding the provision of and increasing participation in cultural activity in East Devon, and providing support to arts and heritage organisations within the district.
2. Was the process of implementation efficient?	The continuation of Year 1 activity on the development of the ACED network was efficient as the groundwork was already in place. Although policy development and scoring of the CEDF grants was time-intensive, using models and materials developed for previous grants ensured a smooth roll-out of the scheme.
3. Did the project provide good value for money?	For the small budget awarded, the Cultural Programme was able to overachieve on output targets and deliver a huge number of impacts. The CEDF in particular demonstrated great value for money as the benefits of each project were significant in comparison to the small amount of funding awarded.
4. Did the project provide additionality?	The Cultural Programme continued to be the main source of public support for local creative and cultural activity in East Devon. Although there are other artist collectives and potential funding pots, such as Arts Council funding, these do not provide the flexibility required to meet changing needs at a local level.
5. Did the project align with the strategic ambitions set out in the UKSPF Investment Plan?	Strong strategic alignment was shown through Year 2 activity on the Cultural Programme. Although the CEDF was not outlined in the Investment Plan, it clearly worked towards ambitions such as improving the local cultural offer, bring communities together through creative activities, and inspire appreciation of and a desire to protect East Devon's natural landscape.

Lessons Learnt:

- Implementation of a formal and transparent grant process with a defined policy and scoring criteria is a fairer and more robust way of issuing small grants to creative organisations and attracts interest from a wider range of community groups.
- Provision of capital grants to improve facilities and amenities is currently absent, and likely out of scope, for the Cultural Programme, but should be considered in the design of future funding programmes.

- Grant scheme recipients require support to measure and accurately report the outputs and outcomes achieved and the definitions for each metric need to be available at both the application and reporting stages.
- The popularity of training sessions varies by topic and method of delivery and attendance should continue to be monitored to ensure all sessions are attracting sufficient interest to provide good value for money.
- Delivery of cultural projects is often time-bound and running a year round grant scheme with a longer delivery window can unlock additional applications from seasonal events.
- The under provision of cultural and creative activities for young adults requires greater EDDC intervention via targeted and specific support and cannot be left solely to community arts organisations.

East Devon Leisure Programme Year 2 Evaluation

Project Lead	Andrew Dare (LED)
Intervention	E10: Funding for local sports facilities, tournaments, teams and leagues to bring people together
Total Allocation	£114,000
Year 2 Allocation	£38,000
Year 2 Spend	£38,000

Output	Target (across 3 years)	Achieved
Number of events/participatory programmes	7	15
Number of volunteering opportunities supported	8	10
Outcome	Target (across 3 years)	Achieved
Improved perception of facilities/amenities	750	604
Increased users of facilities/amenities	450	12,811

Year 2 Overview

Year 2 of the East Devon Leisure Programme continued to be delivered by the Outreach Team at LED under their three-year contract. This included the introduction of several new activities, such as the Fibromyalgia project, and the continuation of Year 1 successes like Pickleball. Whilst Year 1 featured a smaller number of more expensive projects appealing to large numbers, Year 2 activities were aimed at smaller cohorts with specific physical needs.

Over the course of Year 2, a closer working relationship was established between UKSPF programme management and the Outreach Team at LED. Through this partnership, EDDC were able to have greater influence over the strategic direction of the programme and the groups targeted. This led to a renewed focus on targeting younger and working age adults to align the programme more closely with the aims of the UKSPF Investment Plan.

LED employs a robust process in the development of new projects for the Leisure Programme. Team members can pitch ideas which are then shaped into a formal proposal. Where possible, they research national examples of similar projects and seek best practice models to guide implementation. This leads to the selection of projects which have proven efficacy and are suitable for the facilities and communities within East Devon.

The Nutriri pilot, originally scheduled in Year 1 and deferred due to lack of take-up, was abandoned after a new marketing approach failed to generate interest. Whilst this project did not demonstrate a return on investment, a practical approach was

taken by the LED Team in cutting their losses and using the experience as a learning curve rather than investing further time and resource into the pilot.

Aside from Nutriiri, the activities carried out in Year 1 have continued into Year 2, with the initial investment in equipment demonstrating good value for money as participant numbers increased with little or no additional funding. For example, in Year 1, running Pickleball cost £3.37 per participant, but this has decreased to just £0.42 per person in Year 2. Similar return on investment was seen for both the Inbody machines, which reduced from £390 to £14.79 per participant, and the Born to Move Programme, which dropped from £7.53 to £6.52 per person.

During Year 2, the LED website underwent a transformation. Although not funded by UKSPF, the Outreach Team used the opportunity to [update the webpages](#) to detail the activities funded under the programme. This provided a key opportunity to raise the UKSPF in public consciousness and to advertise the new elements to residents.

Year 2 Activities

The new activities funded in Year 2 included:

- **Strength and Balance** – exercise classes targeted at the 55+ age group to retain fitness and mobility to prevent falls and injuries. In Year 2, 673 people attended a Strength and Balance class, with a cost of £0.74 per attendee.
- **Seachange** – a programme of activities run in partnership with [Seachange charity](#) to drive engagement with their offerings. They provide a range of community support measures in the sphere of health and wellbeing, including exercise classes, activity clubs, and gym inductions. The eight-week programme delivered to 15 participants provided free access to LED facilities, including the pools, gyms, and access to the wellbeing suite. At a total of £1,456, each participant cost £97.07.
- **Fibromyalgia** – targeted pain management pilot for individuals suffering from fibromyalgia. The 12-week programme of classes contained exercises specifically designed for 15 individuals with fibromyalgia to reduce their pain and create a sense of community. The project cost £2,560, or £170.67 per participant.
- **Health MOTs** – free health MOTs were provided to working parents in East Devon to empower them with information regarding their health and encourage them to use LED facilities. With 106 people taking up the service, which cost £1,000 to deliver, the cost per participant worked out at £9.43 per participant.

A further four projects commenced delivery in the last quarter of Year 2, so the impact of these is not yet evident. These will be covered in the Year 3 evaluation.

Outputs, Outcomes, and Impacts

All outputs and outcomes are either on track to be met by the end of Year 3 or have already been exceeded. This indicates that the outputs and outcomes selected align well with the design of the programme and that LED have the required systems in

place to measure and track them. It also shows that targets were set too low, without sufficient understanding of the numbers which could be expected. For example, whilst the target for increased user numbers was only 450, over 12,000 have engaged with the programme. This data provides us with the information required to set more accurate targets for future years or iterations of this programme.

There are clear qualitative benefits emerging from the Leisure Programme. A [case study](#) produced on the Fibromyalgia project showed the huge positive impact the classes had on participants, not only in easing their physical symptoms, but in enabling connection with other people with the conditions. 100% of participants reported enjoying the classes and 90% reported an improvement in their mental wellbeing as a result.

The outreach programme is also demonstrating some effectiveness at engaging non-members to participate in health and wellbeing activities. This is clear in the case of the Health MOTs, where 72% of attendees were not LED members. However, to fully assess the impact of the Leisure Programme as a driver towards the leisure centres and promoting a healthy lifestyle, we would need further data on how many participants of outreach activities subsequently signed up as members.

In Year 2, the main age demographics reached were those under 16 and those over 65, with fewer activities attracting the working age population. This is partly due to LED's partnerships with local schools which enables them to easily engage thousands of school children in exercise. Older residents are also a natural area of focus for outreach activities, as they may not be able to participate in standard exercise classes and require specially designed activities.

Whilst LED aim to attract larger numbers of young adults to the centres, this has always been a hard demographic to entice, as many younger residents prefer the environment of a private gym. However, as outlined in the Leisure Strategy, there is a reduction in young people participating in physical activity and a need to ensure all age groups are catered for in our leisure offering. The need to expand the programmes specifically targeting young adults using UKSPF funding was emphasised to LED and this led to the introduction of the Health MOTs for working parents. On the back of this feedback, more programmes are being designed for Year 3 that target the 18-30 demographic.

The return on investment achieved across the programme varied massively. Whilst activities with mass appeal and low running costs, such as Pickleball and Strength and Balance, demonstrate great value for money, the more specialised activities had a much higher cost per participant. The most expensive activity per participant was the Fibromyalgia project, where the cost was £170 for each individual who took part in the 3-month programme.

This discrepancy reflects the dual aims of the outreach work done by LED. Although it aims to encourage people to use their facilities and increase membership by broadening and advertising the offers available, it also reflects LED's values as a charitable trust. Some provisions are specialist and won't produce significant participant numbers but have a major positive impact to participants who have no

other avenues to access similar services. The social value provided by these activities is far greater than their economic value, but the varied offering allows for good return on investment across the programme and enables delivery of less economically viable projects.

Evaluation Summary

Key Question	Response
1. Was the project effective?	Year 2 of the Leisure Programme was delivered effectively, with a wide range of outreach activities delivered, high participation numbers, engagement with non-members, and visible qualitative benefits.
2. Was the process of implementation efficient?	The activities were designed and delivered efficiently by the LED Team through effective project management. Activities and reports were delivered in alignment with agreed timescales and could all be carried out by the existing team members.
3. Did the project provide good value for money?	Although return on investment differed across activities, the programme demonstrated good value for money overall, with the average cost per participant just £1.94 across all activities and few overhead costs.
4. Did the project provide additionality?	The Leisure Programme provided additionality through the development of new activities and the design of specialist programmes which have not been delivered previously.
5. Did the project align with the strategic ambitions set out in the UKSPF Investment Plan?	The Leisure Programme continued to promote community wellbeing and encourage residents to engage in healthy behaviours, however there was a lack of focus in Year 2 on targeting the 18-30 age range.

Lessons Learnt

- Active engagement between EDDC's Programme Management team and Project Leads is required to ensure there is strategic alignment between programme delivery and the wider aims of the UKSPF Programme.
- It is important to consider whether targets are set too low as well as too high when assessing if they are realistic. Indicative participant figures for each activity would have provided more robust estimated engagement numbers. Where targets are set too low, it is hard to benchmark our achievement and it can become less valuable in terms of determining success.
- Engagement of the 18-30 age group in leisure activities requires specific targeting in both the design of activities and the marketing, even where the offering is open to all ages.
- Recording the number of participants who become members of LED, or continue to engage with other outreach activities after their initial involvement with a programme, is key to determining the effectiveness of the outreach programme as a driver of increased membership numbers.

East Devon Towns Feasibility Work Year 2 Evaluation

Project Lead	Alison Hayward
Intervention	E31 - Funding to support relevant feasibility studies
Total Allocation	£105,000
Year 2 Allocation	£35,000
Year 2 Spend	£35,000

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

Year 2 Activity

The focus of Year 2 activity was the production of a feasibility study regarding redevelopment opportunities and potential uses of Manstone Lane Youth Centre in Sidmouth. Additional activity in Year 2 included a smaller, follow-on study for the Station Hub in Ottery St Mary, and the ongoing consideration of the findings of the Year 1 feasibility studies to identify potential projects.

Sidmouth

To unlock the funding earmarked for Sidmouth, the Town Council had to submit a proposal to EDDC laying out the strategic case for the study and its scope. The brief for the feasibility study centred on the ‘nature and location of the services offered to young people,’ with a particular focus on redesign and rebuild options of the Sidmouth Youth Centre at the Manstone Lane site. EDDC approved the proposal in June 2023, after which a grant agreement was signed between EDDC and Sidmouth Town Council (STC) to transfer the funding to STC to manage the procurement of the study. This contrasted the approach taken in Year 1, where the time constraints meant EDDC directly appointed the consultants for Honiton and Ottery St Mary.

The scope of the work was determined by the 2023 “Vision and Draft Strategy for the Future of Young People in the Sid Valley.” This strategy identified three options for the future provision of youth services by STC; two of which looked at redeveloping the existing Manstone Lane site and one option to deliver services in an alternative location. The aim of the UKSPF study was to consider the feasibility of these three options and provide estimated costs for each, including capital costs and running expenses. The brief also included finding potential funding sources, detailing the financial sustainability of each model, and evaluating their alignment with the aspirations of young people in the Sid Valley laid out in the 2023 vision.

As the Manstone Lane Youth Centre had reached the end of its usable life and ceased to be fit for purpose, a decision needed to be taken urgently on the future of the building. The final feasibility report considered four scales of rebuild and redesign of the Youth Centre, with a fifth option to relocate youth provision elsewhere and dispose of the building. The minimum capital cost required to enact any of the options was the option to relocate, which was estimated to be £466,000, including £250,000 to purchase an alternative building. The rebuild costs ranged from £1.07m for the 'extra small' option to £2m for the large-scale development.

In addition to the capital costs, each option explored potential uses of the space and mapped the indicative income and running costs of various usages. Activities proposed included social spaces such as cafés, a dance studio, and a climbing wall. Each option was ranked against the vision set forth and the amenities most favoured by young people as outlined in the Vision and Draft Strategy for the Future of Young People in the Sid Valley.

The final feasibility study included the history and current operation of the building, an overview of all five options, and a forecast of ongoing costs for each option. It also highlighted the additional work required to bring any option forward, including finding appropriate funding, public consultations, and regulation compliance.

These findings were considered by Sidmouth Town Council's Youth Provision Working Group in March 2024, who issued two recommendations to full council. These were to undertake a full review of commissioned youth services to redesign the existing provision and support this with a five-year action plan, and to close the Manstone Lane site from September 2024 and provide youth services from an alternative identified location. In the Full Council meeting held on the 1st July 2024, the Council resolved that both of the recommendations were taken forward and the closure of the Manstone Lane site was publicly announced.

Ottery St Mary

In addition to the Sidmouth study, £1,085 of Year 2 funding was issued to undertake further feasibility work in Ottery St Mary. Stir to Action, a co-operative that supports economic development projects, was appointed to facilitate workshops between stakeholders to determine the best next steps from the Year 1 feasibility study. The Town Council had identified three follow-on actions from the study regarding the Station Hub Youth Centre that they wished to explore with this additional funding. This involved the creation of three strategies: one for carrying out recommendations from the earlier UKSPF-funded report, another for acquiring the funding needed to carry these out, and a third for deciding future governance arrangements for the Station Hub.

The first stage of the work was to create a Hub Steering Group to consider the findings of the Year 1 study and facilitate the development of these strategies. The first feasibility study outlined costs ranging from £400,000 to £1.6 million for each redevelopment options, with all figures likely to have increased with rising construction costs. As even the lowest cost far exceeded the capital budget available to Ottery St Mary Town Council, the Year 1 study was framed as an 'aspirational

long-term vision' used to inform the development of options around the £100,000 mark.

The report produced by Stir to Action outlined the discussions held by the steering group and the requirements needed before any projects could be implemented. With budget limitations meaning the extent of potential projects was restricted to minor improvements such as enhanced signage, the full refurbishment options presented by the Year 1 study were unachievable without significant external funding. To facilitate the acquisition of funding, it was determined that the Station Hub required a Project Manager and a formal governance structure.

One possibility mooted was the creation of a Community Interest Company, to whom ownership of the project would be transferred. This organisation would have greater access to grant funding pots than the Town Council, thereby increasing the likelihood of obtaining external funding. The report highlighted that the only scenario under which the proposals from the Year 1 study could be carried forward would be the creation of a government scheme offering large capital grants for community assets. In the absence of this, the likelihood of large-scale redevelopment of the Station Hub was deemed minimal.

Honiton

Year 2 activity also involved the exploration of implementation options for the Lace Walk Car Park feasibility study conducted in Year 1 (2023/24). The proposal to transform the site into a 'mobility hub' was taken to EDDC's Green Team, an officer group who consider and can fund projects associated with a clear reduction in carbon emissions. The Green Team referred the project to Car Parking as there was not a packageable project with evident environmental benefits to take forward, and felt it was better positioned elsewhere. When the car park at Lace Walk was resurfaced, the lines were redrawn to allow the creation of additional parent and child spaces as the study had shown this would not negatively impact the car parking income on the site.

Beyond the implementation of these small-scale works, there have been no further proposed projects arising from the Lace Walk study. Although the potential for a mobility hub was explored at the site, it is ill-suited for this purpose and lacks the transport infrastructure to fulfil this role. In the absence of further funding or internal appetite to develop the findings into concrete projects, it is unlikely any additional benefit will be derived from this study.

Outputs, Outcomes, and Impacts

Only one type of output and one type of outcome have been set for Feasibility Work, the fewest of any UKSPF project. As the funding was allocated for a single activity – the development of feasibility studies - and the exact scope of each study was unknown when targets were set, no other outputs or outcomes were deemed relevant. With the completion of the Sidmouth study, the target output of three feasibility studies was met.

Despite full achievement of outputs, the UKSPF Feasibility Work has not yet reported a single outcome, with no projects of significance coming forward or likely to come forward as a result of the feasibility studies undertaken to date. For all the feasibility studies conducted so far, the costs to enacting even the smallest scale of redevelopment has far exceeded budgets, with additional constraints such as insufficient staff resource preventing projects from coming forward.

It is in the nature of feasibility work that not all options explored will be deemed to be feasible, and this knowledge can still be a worthwhile outcome. Members at Sidmouth Town Council deemed the study a 'really useful piece of work' because it served as the 'catalyst in making a decision to close the current building'. Although the 'study itself showed what many suspected already', receiving confirmation that capital redevelopment works at any scale at the Manstone Lane site were well beyond the budget of STC enabled them to make the final decision to close the centre and explore alternative options.

As the above quotes from STC show, it was expected that the study would demonstrate that redevelopment of the Manstone Lane Youth Centre was unfeasible and beyond the financial limitations of the council. This raises the question of whether funding a study mainly focused on redevelopment was the most effective option for achieving the outcomes stated in STC's proposal. STC's aim in commissioning the study was to regenerate youth services in the town and expand the provision of training and educational opportunities. By focusing on the physical infrastructure rather than modelling new ways of providing these services, the study did not meet either of these outcomes.

Whilst the precise costs of the rebuild options were unknown prior to the study, the town council was aware that the likely sums involved exceeded capital available and that the building was at the end of its life. The findings of the previous study on youth provision had determined that the old model of delivering youth services from a single site was not the preference of Sid Valley's young people. It is therefore unclear why the feasibility study was required to conclude that disposal of the site was the best route forward.

Furthermore, the second recommendation agreed by Sidmouth Town Council was to commission a review into how youth service provision could be reimaged. As this was a known requirement when the brief for the feasibility study was being constructed, this review could've been prioritised instead, or the scope of the study extended to model alternative youth provision options.

These concerns are also relevant to the Station Hub in Ottery St Mary. Although it was known prior to the study that there was insufficient staff resource, capital budget, or upcoming government grant schemes to facilitate delivery of any proposed project, the decision was still taken to focus on capital redevelopment of the site. Whilst implementing proposals from feasibility studies is a long-term project, options presented can quickly become outdated and more expensive, undermining the viability of projects if they are not taken forward soon after the study is conducted. Likewise, the creation of a mobility hub around Lace Walk car park was always unlikely due to the infrastructure limitations, and high costs involved.

This suggests that the lack of outcomes and impact resulting from the three feasibility studies is a function of the selection of unsuitable projects. Each project had serious viability concerns from the outset, with the lack of available capital funding or opportunities to apply for grants presenting a major barrier. As indicative budgets were known prior to the undertaking of each study, projects should have been selected that had costings in the range and scope of available funds (internal or external), and for which there was sufficient staff capacity.

Many of the issues experienced in Year 2 were highlighted in the Year 1 evaluation, such as the need to ensure sufficient capital funding is either in place or grant funding opportunities are identified prior to undertaking feasibility studies to ensure there are possibilities to carry forward identified projects. The reoccurrence of similar challenges in Year 1 and Year 2 clearly demonstrates the impact of not implementing these recommendations, although these were made after Year 2 activity had commenced.

Key Question	Response
1. Was the project effective?	The project was effective in producing the feasibility studies required but was not effective at proposing viable projects which the commissioners had the resources and capacity to implement.
2. Was the process of implementation efficient?	The transfer of funds to Sidmouth Town Council to procure consultancy services was smooth and the report was produced within the required time frame.
3. Did the project provide good value for money?	In the absence of any tangible outcomes or impacts from the funding spent, the project cannot be deemed to represent good value for money.
4. Did the project provide additionality?	As no projects have as yet been taken forwards as a result of the feasibility work undertaken, the project cannot be said to have provided additionality.
5. Did the project align with the strategic ambitions set out in the UKSPF Investment Plan?	The project has deviated from the intention in the Investment Plan to develop feasibility studies on town-centre assets owned by EDDC. Although the move towards other public sector assets with a greater community focus was an agreed shift due to absence of suitable EDDC sites, it still represents a significant departure from the strategic case laid out.

Lessons Learnt

- Identification of sites for feasibility studies should be done via a robust review process which considers the suitability of the proposal to meet its stated aims.

- Feasibility studies should focus on EDDC assets or those upon which we exercise significant influence to retain agency in progressing proposed projects.
- Prior to undertaking feasibility work, existing capital budgets and/or the identification of a specific grant fund of the required scale and scope should be confirmed, covering at least the minimum costs required to carry out work proposed.
- Prior to undertaking feasibility studies, the organisation owning the asset in question must possess sufficient staff capacity and relevant capabilities to progress any proposed projects.
- There should be a clear timeline for projects to come forward before the assessments become outdated, including the prioritisation of next steps to get the key enablers in place.

Innovation and Resilience Fund Round 2 Year 1 and 2 Evaluation

Project Lead	Tom Winters	
Intervention	E29: Supporting decarbonisation and improving the natural environment whilst growing the local economy and 1.1 Funding (capital grants) for small scale investment in micro and small enterprises in rural areas.	
Intervention	Net Zero Innovation Fund (UKSPF)	Supporting Rural Businesses (REPF)
Total Original Allocation	£209,554	£427,000
Year 1 Allocation	£39,127	£0
Year 2 Allocation	£13,086	£106,787
Year 1 Spend	£0	£0
Year 2 Spend	£49,626	£96,126

Background

Between September 2021 and May 2021, EDDC awarded £2.1million of grant funding to 51 businesses through the Innovation and Resilience Fund (IRF). Grants between £2,500 and £150,000 were issued to support transformational projects that aimed at improving productivity, reducing carbon emissions, diversifying into new products or services, or enabling increased usage of digital technologies.

The high demand for grant funding through the IRF scheme, and the number of applications still being submitted at the end of the funding window, provided a clear rationale to include a similar business grant scheme within the Investment Plan for UKSPF. Whilst the original commitment of funding was a response to the economic turbulence created by the pandemic, the need for grant support had not abated in the post-pandemic climate of economic uncertainty and high inflation. Additionally, the IRF provision of project sponsor support to assist businesses in developing their grant applications created a pool of potential applicants from those who were unsuccessful previously.

The Investment Plan included a proposal for a Net Zero Innovation Fund following the model of IRF but only including funding for decarbonisation projects and innovative low carbon businesses. The announcement of the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) created an opportunity to operate an additional grant scheme with a focus on improving productivity in rural businesses. To simplify the funding landscape for businesses and rationalise the officer time spent on grant delivery, the two funding pots were combined into the Innovation and Resilience Fund Round 2, with three pathways reflecting the aims of the two funds.

Application Process

Development of the IRF2 scheme began with the creation of a policy document describing the parameters and eligibility requirements of the fund. It outlined the three pathways under which businesses could apply. The net zero innovation pathway – funded through the UKSPF Net Zero Innovation pot – was for businesses looking to develop a new product, service, or technology with a strong net zero focus. Rural businesses looking to grow by increasing productivity or developing new products and/or services applied through the rural innovation pathway, whilst the farm diversification pathway was exclusively for farm businesses developing products, services, and technologies not related to agriculture. The latter two pathways were both funded via REPF. Whilst amendments were made to the original/IRF1 policy to comply with the new objectives and the central government requirements, policy development was heavily informed by previous grant schemes managed by the Economic Development team.

The Net Zero Innovation Fund was allocated funding throughout all three years of UKPSF, however, the REPF was not available until Year 2. Delays in receiving the Year 1 allocation led to the introduction of a rollover period until the end of June 2023 where Year 1 funding could still be spent. This window was used to open the Innovation and Resilience Fund to applications so Year 1 and Year 2 funding could be spent simultaneously from only one round of applications.

As with IRF1, all businesses had to submit an expression of interest (EOI) via an online form using the Firmstep software prior to sending in a full application. Instead of contracting Strata to develop the form – as was done previously – this was delivered internally to reduce the length of time taken. The expression of interest round conducted basic eligibility checks on project proposals to prevent businesses wasting time developing ineligible bids. All submissions were reviewed by the Project Lead, with approved EOIs invited to send in a full application via email. Expressions of Interest could be completed between 28th April 2023 and the 19th May 2023, although full bids could be submitted until the 9th June 2023.

All full bids were scored by a primary and secondary appraiser in accordance with a scoring matrix which weighted criteria to ensure the strength of applications was mirrored in the scores awarded. Scoring was done independently, with each application then discussed between the two officers to arrive at a combined score and joint recommendation.

A summary of all applications, scores, and recommendations was compiled and presented to the UKSPF Programme Management Panel (PMP). The PMP consists of members who are given oversight of the grants process and issue the ultimate judgement on approvals and rejections of grant applications, informed by officer recommendations. Over the course of a 2-hour panel meeting, all applications were considered, with all applications either approved, rejected, or approved subject to the satisfaction of specific conditions. Successful applicants were then issued with a Grant Funding Agreement stating the terms of the award and the legal duties of each party. After the agreements were signed by both the applicant and EDDC, the payments were issued. These were done in two tranches as the REPF payments had to be delayed due to late receipt of our Year 2 allocation from central

government whilst those funded through UKSPF could receive funding as soon as the agreements were signed.

Received Applications

IRF2 received 21 full bids, of which four were under the Net Zero Innovation pathway and 17 were submitted under Rural Productivity. There were no bids submitted for Farm Diversification projects. When early indication from the EOI stage showed few Net Zero Innovation projects coming forward, a week long extension was granted for just that pathway. Although this resulted in 14 additional EOIs being completed, only three were eligible and only two full bids were subsequently submitted.

Of the total 21 projects submitted, three did not meet the basic eligibility criteria, with an additional three projects that were not strong enough to be considered by the Panel. The six projects removed from consideration included all four bids submitted under the Net Zero Innovation pathway.

To ensure full spend of the Net Zero Innovation pot whilst maintaining the original intention of the fund, the officers proposed to the panel that four projects submitted under the Rural Productivity pathway should be supported using the Net Zero Innovation funding. These projects were selected because they would result in significant carbon savings and/or biodiversity net gain for the business, despite not having a Net Zero focus. This strategy was approved by the PMP, resulting in the full allocation of the Net Zero Innovation funding.

Of the remaining 11 applications presented to the PMP for consideration, seven were approved by the Panel, leaving an underspend of £7,900 for the Rural Productivity pathway. One applicant declined the grant due to an inability to leverage the match funding needed to complete the project, creating a total underspend of £10,660.94. After the funding was issued, a further applicant opted to return the grant as they were also unable to dedicate the match funding required. This created an underspend in the Net Zero Innovation Fund of £10,076.

The number and strength of the applications submitted for each pathway provides a strong evidence base for the demand for types of grant funding amongst East Devon's businesses. Although applications for new, zero carbon technologies were submitted for IRF1, none were submitted for IRF2. This suggests that either there are few of those projects emerging in the district and IRF1 captured all those which were investment ready, or that the larger amounts available and absence of a match funding requirement in IRF1 were needed to make innovative projects viable.

The relative popularity of the Rural Productivity pathway, which had the greatest flexibility in what applicants could apply for, suggests that demand is highest when fewer eligibility criteria are imposed. However, the number of applications across the whole of the IRF2 was lower than expected, especially compared to IRF1. There are several possible explanations that emerge from comparison of the two funds, such as the match requirement being an obstacle for small businesses, the glut of support offered post-covid absorbing demand for small business grants, or the absence of a large marketing campaign. The high number of applications from those who were unsuccessful in IRF1 suggests that news of the fund was limited and did not reach

new businesses who have not previously engaged with EDDC. Without rerunning the scheme and isolating the factors laid out above, it is not possible to determine which had the largest impact.

Outputs, Outcomes, and Impacts

All recipients of IRF2 funding were given 18 months to successfully complete their project and achieve the outputs laid out in their funding agreement. As this delivery window is still ongoing at the time of writing, it is too early to assess the impact of the projects funded. However, the milestones and outputs in the funding agreements give an indication of what is likely to be achieved.

IRF2 was designed to address key economic and environmental challenges for the district and serve as a stimulant for the local economy. It aimed to improve productivity, accelerate business growth, and create higher value employment opportunities across the district. Specific pathways also had the additional aims of enabling the innovation and commercialisation of low carbon goods and services and facilitating farm diversification. The lack of eligible applications under the Net Zero Innovation and Farm Diversification pathways prevented the realisation of these final two aims.

Use of a grant scheme to achieve the above aims provided a reduced level of control in what could be delivered as they are dependent on the projects submitted. Despite creating targeted pathways, the dearth of applications from farms and Net Zero businesses meant the ambition to support those types of projects could not be realised.

Issuing grants to fewer businesses and a reduced diversity of businesses than planned also had a negative impact on the outputs and outcomes forecast within the projects. Targets were generated on the assumption of full spend and whilst output numbers were considered within the scoring matrix, it was only one factor of many considered. These factors mean that a slight reduction in outputs and outcomes have been forecast to result from Round 2 of the IRF than expected when targets were produced. However, as outputs and outcomes are measured cumulatively across all 3 years, a small overperformance in Round 3 will ensure the targets are met.

The DLUHC monitoring process is not able to capture the full impact of the grants awarded. One reason for this is that the DLUHC definition of a job created only enables permanent and full-time roles to be counted in submitted reports. Ongoing economic uncertainty means micro businesses are concerned about taking on permanent staff members whose employment cannot be guaranteed long term and are offering part time and short-term roles. Whilst there is no opportunity to capture the added value of these jobs in the reporting to DLUHC, adhering to the definitions provided means all jobs counted are of a higher quality. This aligns with the IRF2 aim to support higher value employment opportunities, although permanent and full-time employment is not guaranteed to be paid at a higher rate.

Additionally, outputs and outcomes are measured by the number of businesses reporting an increase, rather than the size of the increase. This creates parity in the

outcomes reported between a business reporting a 2% and a 200% increase in productivity, even though there is a significant difference in the impact created.

Achievement of the output relating to the production of decarbonisation plans was not worked towards through IRF2 Year 1 and 2 activity. This output was included in the Investment Plan before the announcement of REPF as a mitigation for any underspend within the Net Zero Innovation Fund and was not required once the grant scheme was broadened out. With a planned change in the administration of these two funding pots in Year 3, progress towards this target will be made.

In the absence of an Economic Development Strategy, the IRF does not have a direct correlation to an adopted strategy. The original proposal for the Net Zero Innovation Fund had stronger links to the Climate Strategy than what was delivered due to the lack of net zero focused projects coming forward. However, the design of the fund was highly informed by the challenges and opportunities articulated in the Investment Plan such as low wages and closing the productivity gap. Additionally, it delivers on the core Council Plan priority to support the development of a resilient economy in the district.

Evaluation Summary

Key Question	Response
1. Was the project effective?	The grant scheme was effective at supporting projects to boost rural productivity but was unable to support innovative net zero projects or specialist low carbon clusters. There was an insufficient number of strong projects coming forward, resulting in an underspend.
2. Was the process of implementation efficient?	The simultaneous Year 1 and Year 2 activity and combination of funding pots enabled large spend in a short amount of time. Use of existing processes and documents from IRF meant efficient administration of the scheme.
3. Did the project provide good value for money?	Scoring projects on need and value for money, including requesting two quotes for each item in the application, ensured public money was spent responsibly. It is too early to determine value for money on the impact of the scheme until all projects are complete.
4. Did the project provide additionality?	The end of European funding left a gap in local growth funding. No regular business support grant schemes were issued by either EDDC or upper tier authorities during this period. There is no provision for this activity in the core EDDC budget.
5. Did the project align with the strategic ambitions set out in the UKSPF Investment Plan?	The projects funded indicate that IRF will achieve the ambitions to boost productivity and create some higher wage jobs. However, many roles created are below the regional average. The aim of using IRF to fund net zero innovation or farm diversification has not been realised.

Lessons Learnt

- There is not a steady supply of small-scale, investment ready, innovative net zero projects in the district that require small-scale grant support. Additional support is required to transform the existing concepts into fundable projects.
- Lower grant awards are better suited to supporting diversification and scale-up projects within established small businesses than newer businesses still in the product development stage.
- An upfront 50% match funding requirement presents a significant barrier to the ability of a business to access grants and should be reviewed for future grants.
- The pathway approach as applied does not lead to greater application numbers for targeted types of projects. The most open and flexible pathway will be most often selected, especially for those who are unsure which pathway to apply under. Instead of providing applicants with a choice of pathways, a tick box on the application form used by officers to categorise projects could reduce confusion.
- Extending deadlines is not an effective method of attracting additional strong applications and can result in a wastage of officer time sorting through ineligible bids.
- Measurements of factors such as productivity and carbon emissions are a struggle for businesses and estimates put in bids are often inaccurate. More support is required to enable businesses to provide accurate measurements. Provision in the application form or grant agreement as to how these factors should be measured would assist in gathering accurate and consistent measurements.
- DLUHC output and outcome definitions should be outlined in application forms in an accessible and easy to understand format to ensure applicants are meeting these in their forecasts.
- Marketing of future grant schemes should be more intensive, innovative and targeted, even where high demand is assumed. The variety of grant schemes and awareness by businesses of the provision of government grants during the pandemic has declined and greater engagement with the business community to convey information about upcoming competitive grants is needed.

Sustainable Tourism Programme Year 2 Evaluation

Project Lead	Geri Panteva
Intervention	E17 – Funding for the development and promotion of the visitor economy
Total Allocation	£229,425
Year 2 Allocation	£80,853 (includes allocation to the CLTF)
Year 2 Spend	£80,853 (includes allocation to the CLTF)

Output	Target (across 3 years)	Achieved (by end of Year 2)
Number of local events or activities supported	30	49
Number of Tourism, Culture or Heritage assets created or improved	10	11
Number of enterprises receiving grants	22	10
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	35	109
Number of people reached	10,000	8,725
Outcome		
Increase in visitor spending	£2,500	£2,533
Increased amount of investment	£85,000	£109,925
Improved perception of attractions	10	17
Increased visitor numbers	200	0
Estimated Carbon dioxide equivalent reductions as a result of support	4	0

Year 2 Activity

The Year 2 Sustainable Tourism Programme allocation was split between three projects. The largest item of spend was the decarbonisation grants issued as part of the Culture, Leisure, and Tourism Fund (CLTF), of which £64,149 went to tourism businesses. This spend is covered in the evaluation of the CLTF. Activity also included the continuation of the East Devon Tourism Network (EDTN), delivery of which is contracted to East Devon Excellence (EDE) to support tourism businesses to enhance their offerings through collaboration and knowledge sharing. A small grant of £5,000 was issued to the Taste East Devon (TED) Festival, which EDDC has been supporting since its inception in 2020.

East Devon Tourism Network

The East Devon Tourism Network commenced in Year 1 of the UKSPF programme with planned delivery across all three years. As the EDTN operates on calendar years (January to December), the review of Year 1 (2023) delivery and subsequent improvements initiated for Year 2 (2024) occurred within the UKSPF Year 2

timeframe (2023/24). Therefore, this evaluation covers two different years of delivery, across which clear development of the operation of the EDTN can be seen.

The EDTN holds four events each year, with each event having a distinct theme. In Year 1 of the EDTN, three of the events centred on the key pillars of the Tourism Strategy, with the final event focused on mental health. The three network meetings delivered within Year 2 of UKSPF were events at the Future Skills Centre (accessibility), Froginwell Vineyard (sustainability), and the Donkey Sanctuary (mental health). As the strategic rationale for the creation of the EDTN was to use collaboration to support tourism businesses to operate in line with these pillars, linking events to the core principles maintained the connection between the strategy and delivery.

Each network meeting provides an opportunity for existing members to gather and forge connections as well as engaging potential members by showcasing the work of the network. Whilst attendance at events is free and open to non-members, they can only attend one meeting without registering to join the network. This is key to ensuring both ongoing growth of the network and deeper collaboration between a core group of members who reliably engage with EDTN activities and build relationships which extend beyond the events.

The events feature guest speakers who impart expertise, share case studies, and provide bitesize training sessions. They include industry experts who present on specialist areas, network members showcasing how they have adopted new business practices, and partners offering new opportunities for collaboration. Examples of speakers included the Managing Director of Accessibility and Inclusion UK who presented their new Accessible Tourism Destination Toolkit, demonstrating how venues could attract and cater better to visitors with additional needs. At Froginwell Vineyard, network member Mazzard Farm shared the sustainability journey of their self-catering accommodation, linking to the work of the East Devon National Landscape on preserving and protecting land. Attendees at the Donkey Sanctuary were provided with an interactive demonstration on how to take better product photos and group shots to use in social media advertising.

Attendance at events stayed steady throughout UKSPF Year 2, with around 60 to 70 attendees showing up to each event. In total, 109 different businesses attended at least one event in 2023, indicating that the events succeeded in attracting both new businesses and developing a cohort of members who saw value in continuing to attend events and become part of the network.

Ahead of the second year of event delivery, East Devon Excellence reviewed the feedback provided by attendees and further guidance from EDDC to design an improved programme for 2024. A new range of topics were selected with less overt reference to the Tourism Strategy but were still aligned with its aims, such as 'Local Food: Lasting Memories', with quality local food and drink highlighted in the strategy as a strength and key opportunity for East Devon. In response to feedback from attendees, EDE sought to make Year 2 events more interactive and provide more time for members to network.

Although EDE, as the contracted provider for the EDTN, were solely responsible for its delivery, there was significant input given from the Project Lead to ensure a successful event series was delivered. This included suggestions of topics, events, and speakers and ensuring continued alignment with the vision of the network. Although the provision of officer time was important in ensuring the quality of events and developing a strong relationship with EDE, the resources invested by EDDC in the development of the EDTN were higher than forecast. Moving forward, EDE needs to take greater ownership of the EDTN and become less reliant on EDDC's involvement.

In addition, EDE were responsible for sustaining the EDTN beyond the events series to ensure members were connected and collaborating year-round. This included the development of dedicated social media webpages to promote EDTN activities and spotlight the work of members, and a newsletter to advertise events and provide the latest updates for the tourism sector.

Another planned outreach activity was the development of a Slack channel for EDTN members. Slack is a business-to-business messaging service where users can form groups, organise content in channels, and send direct messages. Although EDE trialled this during the first year of delivery, it was ultimately discontinued due to a lack of engagement. Finding an alternative method to promote communication between, rather than to, network members is crucial to ensure long term viability and group cohesion, so this needs to be addressed and ameliorated in Year 3 activity.

In the first year of delivery, the value of the EDTN contract was set at £13,000 for delivery of the four events, including speaker fees, venue hire, and refreshments, marketing, and insurance. Due to rising costs and presentation of a plan to improve the quality of events delivered based on Year 1 feedback, EDE requested an increased budget for the 2024 year of delivery. After EDE submitted a new breakdown of costs and an outline of how they proposed to provide additional services to the network, an increase to £20,500 per annum was agreed, representing a 37% increase in the total budget for the network. As only one event was delivered under the increased budget, the impact of this will not be clear until the end of the 2024 calendar year.

Taste East Devon Festival

As a founding sponsor of the Taste East Devon (TED) Festival, EDDC has contributed £5,000 annually to the running costs of the festival since it started in 2020. Taste East Devon is a food and drink festival that runs each September as the peak summer season winds down. Venues across the district run events such as tastings, workshops, and dinners over a two-week period, with a focus on sustainable and local food and drink offerings. It is intended to appeal to both residents and visitors with the hope that those outside of the district will combine event attendance with a longer stay in the region.

Support for the Taste East Devon Festival is not specifically mentioned in the UKSPF Investment Plan, which was written prior to the publication of the Tourism Strategy and leaves room to fund emerging projects resulting from its recommendations.

There is strong alignment between the Tourism Strategy and TED as the local food and drink offer is identified as a key strength that would ‘benefit from further work to reinforce the existing proposition’. Additionally, the timing of the festival aligns with the ambition to develop a year-round tourism offer and extend stays beyond the summer months.

Although the festival is not solely about sustainability, the messaging and ethos of TED is aligned with sustainable practices and good environmental stewardship. There is an inherent environmental benefit to encouraging local food production and consumption as it has a shorter distance to travel, and it creates greater public awareness of where and how their food is produced. Whilst it lacks the explicit decarbonisation focus of a scheme such as the Culture, Leisure, and Tourism Fund, there is a benefit to using more subtle methods to promote sustainable practices, especially for those who are disinterested and deterred by more overt messaging.

Despite its ambition of attracting tourists to East Devon in the shoulder season, the degree to which the festival draws visitors to the area is questionable. Postcode data provided shows that the majority of attendees live in the area, with 87% of attendees from either Devon, Dorset, or Somerset. This means they are unlikely to stay overnight and may not extend their visit beyond the time of their event. However, it is worth noting that the number of postcodes recorded is only a small proportion of all attendees, and no information is gathered on how events fit into wider day or overnight trips.

Outputs, Outcomes, and Impacts

EDTN

EDTN activity related to achievement of several outputs recorded for the Sustainable Tourism Programme. These were the number of events supported, which included all the network meetings, the number of enterprises receiving non-financial support, against which all meeting attendees were counted, and the number of people reached through digital engagement with EDTN content.

While most of the outputs related neatly to EDTN activity, the number of people reached, some of whom were counted via digital engagements, was more challenging to measure robustly. In the government guidance provided, ‘reach’ is defined as ‘those directly engaging (e.g. reading, viewing, attending)’ which leaves room for ambiguity. Although the online content produced was able to attract a high number of viewers, officers determined this was not sufficient to count towards this metric. In the end, only those who opted to follow, subscribe, or comment on content were counted against the output.

Digital communications were also recorded as part of the key performance indicators set in the EDE contract, for which all targets were either met or exceeded. . Over the course of the year, views, clicks, and followers to EDTN pages were up across both LinkedIn and Instagram, with the target of 1,500 people reached exceeded on Instagram alone, which reached over 2,000 people. The target number of 1,600 followers across the three years had been achieved by November 2023, and over 2,500 people were checking the EDE ‘What’s On’ guide each month.

None of the UKSPF outcomes were forecast to be achieved through EDTN activity. This is due to the challenges involved in robustly demonstrating that changes such as an increase in visitor numbers or spending was directly related to their network membership. To evidence this, businesses would first have to report on any changes made due to their membership, and then survey visitors to determine if these factors contributed to their patronage, with the spend then recorded separately for those visitors. Monitoring this would be an administrative challenge, and it is unlikely members would willingly record and provide this information.

In the absence of UKSPF outcomes, more qualitative impacts of the EDTN are measured against the key performance indicators (KPIs) laid out in the contract with EDE. Every six months, performance is reported by EDE to EDDC against seven objectives and nine KPIs, all of which are specific to the project. These showed that the network events were more successful than forecast in attracting attendees, with the minimum target of 35 businesses per event almost doubled, but that it was challenging to convert attendees into network members.

In 2023, only 48 from a target of 75 businesses had signed-up, with only 20% of attendees at each event network members against a 45% target. Although the events have inherent value through their educational purpose and networking opportunities, it is crucial that they serve as a catalyst for attendees to sign up. To function as a proper network, involvement must go beyond the events held and members need to maintain an active and deep engagement with the EDTN. Furthermore, the legacy of the EDTN is reliant on a decreasing public sector investment, with future funding coming from the network members. Therefore, getting attendees to become members is vital to ensuring its long-term future.

When registering as network members, businesses must sign a Memorandum of Understanding, committing them to the values of sustainability, accessibility, quality, and collaboration. The complexity of the MoU was raised by EDE as a potential deterrent, with the sign-up process insufficiently marketed. This led to a simplification of the MoU and reminders and links to join heavily promoted in all marketing and newsletters. Membership numbers need to be closely monitored in Year 3 to determine if the removal of barriers is sufficient to reach required membership numbers, or if alternative engagement methods need to be explored to encourage event attendees to become committed members.

Member's feedback was also a KPI for the EDTN, with a requirement for 70% of attendees rating the events as either 'good' or 'excellent' based on 50% of attendees providing feedback. EDE were unable to demonstrate that this had been met, as response rates did not reach the 50% threshold, and the feedback forms rating events as a number out of 5 rather than on an adjective-based scale. As this average was 4.6/5, it does suggest that the events were perceived as good quality, but it doesn't show what the range of responses was or how many people provided comment.

Another KPI against which the EDTN is measured is the quality and depth of the 'What's On' Guide hosted on the EDE website. Through the EDTN contract, EDE adopted the responsibility of expanding and continually updating the guide to turn it

into the central directory for visitors and residents looking for things to do in the district. Although some changes were made, feedback from stakeholders requested additional improvements as the guide proved difficult to navigate and contained significant omissions. Therefore, this remains a key point to address in the next year of delivery.

The final KPI associated with the EDTN is an annual review of members to demonstrate alignment with the network's mission and aims, and thus alteration of their business practices to support the key pillars of the Tourism Strategy. So far, no specific examples and case studies have been provided as to how involvement with the network has led to businesses improving their sustainability and accessibility.

The network has been able to showcase some collaborative projects that have emerged from the meetings, such as the relationship between drinks manufacturer Bar Buoy and High Grange, an outdoor cooking venue which now supplies their cocktails at its 'feast nights'. Additional partnerships referenced in reports include joint ticket offers between Seaton Tramways, the World of Country Life, and Stuart Line Cruises to promote round trips and experiences across the district, and a breakfast redemption voucher scheme between Mazzard Farm self-catering cottages and Coldharbour Field Kitchen.

EDE were also able to provide a number of quotes and positive testimonials from participating businesses, who were quoted on how 'useful' they find the network and consider the events to be a 'valuable opportunity...to forge new connections, exchange ideas, and open doors to new collaborations and possibilities'. This shows that the EDTN has been effective at meeting the strategic aim of promoting collaboration among network members, with most feedback provided focusing on the benefits of meeting 'like-minded people'. This has been of particular value in the hospitality sector where poor mental health is a common workplace challenge.

It is crucial that the network can evidence further projects and improved practices arising directly from business' involvement in the EDTN for two reasons. The first is that a key objective of the network is for businesses to see value in their membership which would be best evidenced through businesses demonstrating how they have enhanced their offerings as a result. Although the member feedback provided thus far shows businesses have enjoyed the events and found it uplifting and inspiring to speak to and hear from other tourism businesses, the benefits currently realised are largely social, with tangible projects required to realise financial and environmental benefits.

Most importantly, the rationale for the EDTN is tied to the strategic aims of supporting tourism businesses to become more sustainable, accessible, and provide a higher quality offering. To evidence this, EDE need to provide a greater number of case studies for each theme, with businesses providing clear examples of how their involvement in the network motivated them to change their business practices. These cases need to be captured and reported back before their origins become forgotten and they are no longer attributable to the EDTN. In the final year of delivery, it is important that this information is captured so the overall impacts of the network can be demonstrated and assessed.

Taste East Devon Festival

Although support for the TED festival represented a small proportion of the overall budget, it contributed to a large number of outputs and outcomes tracked for the programme. The 44 events delivered throughout the festival contributed towards the 'number of events supported' with attendees counted against 'number of people reached'.

It was more complex to track the outcomes relating the Taste East Devon festival. As the festival is an annual occurrence, it was anticipated that the data from previous years could be used as a benchmark to enable the measurement of increases and improvements in number of visitors and perception. However, as the event schedule is modified each year, only three of the same events were delivered. Furthermore, as some of those has either fixed attendee numbers or ticket prices, there was no scope to increase this across the years. This meant there were only modest increases reported for increases in visitor spending, increased perception of events, and no increases in visitor numbers.

There were two additional challenges in assessing the overall impact of the EDDC contribution to the Taste East Devon festival. Firstly, as support for the festival has been consistent since it began, it is impossible to demonstrate the exact impact of EDDC's contribution as there are no comparison years where the festival operated without this support.

Secondly, factors beyond EDDC control are more impactful for the Sustainable Tourism Programme than most other UKSPF projects. The Taste East Devon Festival was harmed by thunderstorms in September 2023 that caused flash flooding in the district and led to the cancellation of several events. The tourism industry in East Devon has also been hit badly by ongoing issues of sewage pollution which has attracted negative attention on a national level, and domestic visitors across the country also spending less in 2023 than 2022 according to Visit Britain. In this environment, it would be reasonable if the festival recorded lower attendee numbers and a reduced amount of spend, despite EDDC intervention.

This challenge is also applicable to measuring the wider impact of the Sustainable Tourism Programme. As part of the monitoring process for the Tourism Strategy, EDDC procures a dataset showing the performance of the visitor economy each year. Although this provides a valuable data source, it is difficult to use these figures in UKSPF reporting as changes cannot be robustly attributed to UKSPF activity. However, if general upward trends were demonstrated in line with those forecast as part of the Tourism Strategy, then increased support from the sector from EDDC could be assumed to have a positive, if unquantifiable, impact. With tourism businesses experiencing the effects of poor weather, a cost-of-living crisis, and negative press, it is likely any positive effects of the programme would not be represented in the data.

Key Question	Response
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1. Was the project effective?	The project was effective in supporting local events and bringing together businesses to collaborate and share best practice. Further information is required to demonstrate if this has led to improved business practices from the tourism sector.
2. Was the process of implementation efficient?	The project was implemented efficiently with the contract already in place for the EDTN and the process established for the Taste East Devon festival.
3. Did the project provide good value for money?	Value for money is hard to determine without sufficient quantitative and qualitative data to measure impact. As both the EDTN and TED contracts had small and fixed budgets which were allocated to specific types of spend, the delivery partners could not exceed agreed expenditure limits.
4. Did the project provide additionality?	The EDTN is a business-to-business network and has a clear and distinct mission from other tourism networks and organisations operating in East Devon. As TED was previously funded by EDDC via internal business support budgets, it did not provide additionality in terms of new project delivery but freed up that funding to support alternative schemes.
5. Did the project align with the strategic ambitions set out in the UKSPF Investment Plan?	The ethos of the EDTN aligns with the key opportunity identified in the Investment Plan to support the tourism sector to become more accessible and sustainable, although further evidence is required to show examples of businesses changing their practices. With alternate projects coming forward to those proposed in the Investment Plan, there is some deviation from the original scope and aim.

Lessons Learnt:

- Key performance indicators and objectives set out in contracts should be align with the outputs and outcomes selected, with identical metrics used so data provided can be easily used in UKSPF reporting.
- The use of detailed case studies as evidence of the achievement of strategic aims should be explored as a standard method of obtaining feedback on qualitative impacts. This should be done without overburdening beneficiaries with repeated survey requests and the expectation made clear in contracts issued.
- Careful consideration is required during the project design phase to ensure that the necessary data exists to monitor the outputs and outcomes selected and that this can be robustly tied to UKSPF activity. Where this is not available, the scope of what can be monitored should be outlined and tracked throughout the programme.

- Provision of qualitative feedback is often more constructive and insightful than quantitative data. In the absence of clear guidance from MHCLG in how to gather this, EDDC should develop its own methodology to implement across UKSPF projects to ensure consistency and parity.
- Digital engagement figures provided by third parties should be scrutinised prior to being reported to MHCLG. Only metrics which demonstrate users have actively engaged with promoted content should be counted, with impressions or page views discounted. The potential for double counting is high and where there are likely overlaps between followings, only one platform should be included.