

Committee: Scrutiny

Date: Thursday 2nd
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Title: Economic Recovery Delivery Plan - Year 3
Plan and Year 2 Update

**Report
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Summary

1. The three year Uttlesford Economic Recovery Plan was approved on 8 December 2020 to cover the period 1 April 21 – 31 March 2024. The plan is funded by the £1million Business Recovery Fund.
2. This report provides members with an update on the Year 2 Delivery Plan progress and achievements to date and the proposed Year 3 Delivery Plan for 2023/24.

Recommendations

3. The Scrutiny Committee is requested.
 - a. to note the year two Delivery Plan progress as set out in this report.
 - b. to review and provide comment on the draft Year 3 Delivery detailed in Appendix 1 and estimated spend profile set out in Appendix 2.

Financial Implications

4. £1million was allocated to the 3 years Business Recovery Plan and approved by Members in December 2020.

Background Papers

5. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report.

Economic Recovery Plan – Dec 2020

Economic Recovery Plan Year 2 Delivery Plan - 2022

Impact

6.

Communication/Consultation	None
Community Safety	None
Equalities	None
Health and Safety	None
Human Rights/Legal Implications	None
Sustainability	None
Ward-specific impacts	None
Workforce/Workplace	None

Situation

7. The Uttlesford Economic Recovery Plan was approved by Council on 8/12/2020. It provides a framework for the activities delivered by the Economic Development Team until March 2024.
8. The Year 1 Delivery Plan provided the detail for delivery in the year 1 April 2021 – 31 March 2022. However, the management of business support grants funded by both the UK Government and Essex County Council restricted the breadth of work delivered during the year and only £130k was used to fund Economic Recovery Plan initiatives.
9. The lifting of Covid restrictions resulted in a sigh of relief and the end of the business support grants which had consumed the resources in the Economic Development Team in 21/22.
10. The year two plan included resources of four full time members of the staff, the team were unable to recruit and started the year with one full time vacancy and the full time seconded member of staff returned to her substantive post in June 2022. These two posts remained vacant until January 2023.
11. In May 2022 the Government launched the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Uttlesford's conditional allocation was £1million. There was a very short deadline imposed on Council's to submit an investment plan, which was conditional to receiving the funds. The Economic Development Team focused on developing the Investment Plan. The Investment Plan was submitted to the UK Government on 1 August 2022, with conditional approval for Year 1 given in December and final approval granted in February 2023.
12. The Government launched a further scheme, The Rural England Prosperity Fund as an addendum to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the team had to re-prioritise their workload to meet the challenging deadline imposed. The

addendum was submitted on 30 November 2022, with the outcome expected in late March 2023 and if approved will provide £813,487 capital funds to be spent by 31 March 2025.

13. The shared prosperity funds are expected to provide £1,813,487 for projects and initiatives in the Uttlesford district under the UK Government's Levelling Up agenda by 31 March 2025. UK Shared Prosperity Fund delivery is underway, and it is hoped that approval for the Rural England Prosperity Fund will be announced in late March 2023.
14. The following table highlights the spend profile of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund.

Year	Total UKSPF Funds (£)	UKSPF - Minimum capital funds (£)	UKSPF – Maximum revenue spend (£)	REPF – capital spend (£)
2022/23	109,808	18,000	91,808	N/A
2023/24	219,617	59,000	160,617	203,371.75
2024/25	670,575	140,000	530,575	610,115.25
TOTAL	1,000,000	217,000	783,000	813,487.00

15. Delivery of the Year 2 recovery plan initiatives has been delayed by the launch of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and its addendum, the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF). Although these were not competitive funds, each local authority was required to submit an Investment Plan for both funds to receive the conditional allocation. Staff resources were required to be prioritised on these funds to meet the required timescales.

16. Throughout December 2022 and January 2023 the Economic Development Team, with two new members of staff who joined us from January 2023, have been able to focus on the delivery of the Year 2 Economic Recovery Delivery Plan.

17. In addition to the day-to-day management of the Council's car parks, and provision of business support advice, the Economic Development Team has also:

- Launched the Growth and Increased Productivity Fund in January 2023
- Launched the High Street Premises Enhancement Fund in January 2023
- Held a Business Support Day in Saffron Walden in September 2022
- Delivered a tourism marketing campaign to promote DiscoverUttlesford website and the DiscoverUttlesford app.
- Launched an enhanced Visit Essex membership package to local tourism sector businesses.
- Produced the on and off street Car Parking Review for the whole district.

- Produced the Business Support Guide, Business Start-Up Guide and business support leaflet to accompany Council Tax bills.
- Delivery of Digital Boost Week, with an associated grant scheme.
- Produced Business e-newsletters to over 2,000 people, monthly advertising in the local newspapers and social media activity to promote initiatives,
- First meeting of the Local Partnership Group, who will oversee the delivery of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund.
- Launched a UK Shared Prosperity Fund grant scheme for business start-ups across the district.
- Re launched the Business Development Business Rates Relief Policy

Planned for delivery in Q4

- Ambitious Women in Essex event – 28th February – in collaboration with ECC
- Enterprise Uttlesford – 2nd March - business breakfast and announcement of the winners of four Enterprise Uttlesford business award categories
- Go Green Uttlesford – 6th March - lunch and announcement of the winners of the four Go Green business award categories.
- Showcase Uttlesford – 8th March - evening reception and announcement of the four Showcase Uttlesford business award categories.
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund grant applications for funds in 2022/23 will be discussed at the next Local Partnership group meeting in late February.

18. It is projected that Year 2 spend will be approximately £220,000 leaving a balance for Year 3 of £650,000.

19. Appendix 1 contains the draft Delivery Plan for Year 3, 2023/24. This is an evolving document as we have identified the need to survey local businesses to identify the support that they need to survive, to move forward through the cost of living crisis / recession and to grow, or to tackle Climate Change issues. Following the completion of the survey the Plan will be updated with a more detailed list of planned and costed initiatives.

20. Appendix 2 contains the expected spend profile for 2023/24 against each of the Economic Recovery Plan's priority objectives.

Challenges and Risks

21. Year 3 Economic Recovery Plan is aspirational, due to the additional management and administration of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund this may not be achievable over the next 12 months within the current staffing resource.

22. The lack of commercial premises and land is restricting the ability of local businesses to grow, and some have already moved out of the district. The availability of commercial land and premises is key to the achievement of economic growth in the district, and it is hoped that this will be addressed in the emerging Local Plan.
23. The lack of incubator units, small industrial units and business start-up space has been identified as an issue for the Uttlesford economy since 2016. Entrepreneurial activity has dropped within the district so that Uttlesford is now ranked 307th out of 309 English districts based on Dec 2022 data. This is a significant drop from our position of 225th in December 2021.
24. During 2022/23 the Economic Development Team have had access to the North Essex Economic Board procured business support services, funded through a top slice of one of the Government's Covid-19 business support grants, the Additional Restrictions Grant. These contracts will all expire by 31 March 2023. We are currently identifying which business support services are required and how best to provide access for these to local businesses.

Risk Analysis

25.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
Loss of staff	1 – recently recruited	3 - if staff left there would be significant impact on the planned delivery and the work plan would need to be reviewed	Ensure that all projects are covered by 2 officers to ensure no single point of failure and staff are fully supported

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.