

The Scottish Parliament Finance and Public Administration Committee

Submission from Angus Council

Thank you for the opportunity to provide any further comment on the experiences of Angus Council to the UK Government's approach to Levelling Up and UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

In general the approach to the Levelling-Up agenda is welcomed, in particular the recognition that local government is best placed to identify and deliver and flexibility to collaborate more regionally where this can deliver added value.

Of particular concern is the approach to the Levelling Up funds and use of a competitive grant process and in particular the approach to Round 3 which has meant that local authorities who had taken the time to further develop bids have been denied to the opportunity to be considered.

Levelling Up Funds

The approach to identifying areas of priority places in round two (including the effectiveness of the updates and changes to priority places from Round one) and the investment themes;

In terms of identifying areas of priority this ignored the fact that certain parts of local authority areas have high levels of deprivation, which is what the Levelling-Up Fund is designed to tackle and therefore little correlation with how the successful project will help address. The system could be changed so that each bid is judged on its own merits and geographies rather than a weighted local authority ranking. This could be address through the application process and business case.

The process for bidding for round two funding and awarding successful bids;

Competitive grant fund process require a significant resource to develop and prepare bids and this is far more challenging for smaller local authorities who have less resource and often have smaller pots of funding to support transformational projects. Small local authorities are therefore disadvantaged as a result.

The capacity building funding has helped however resource is still required to develop and support proposals. Of significant frustration is the time and energy put into developing proposals only for the goalposts for Round 3 to shift.

The extent to which any funding for successful bids in rounds one and two have been released, to what timescales (compared with any in your project bid) and how confident you remain that the outcomes/projects will be delivered within the agreed funding and timescales;

Not applicable as no successful bid.

Monitoring arrangements in place for Levelling Up funds.

Not applicable as no successful bid.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund (grant determinations for revenue and capital for 2022-23 and 2023-24)

The process for agreeing and submitting your investment plan;

The investment plan was fairly high level and the flexibility across the different priority areas allowed tailoring to the specific priorities within the local authority area to target areas of greatest need.

Timescale for development of the investment plan were challenging and the resource to prepare needed to be balanced alongside existing work priorities. This precluded the level of engagement we would have liked to undertake.

The extent to which the funding you were allocated will deliver the outcomes identified in your investment plan within the agreed timeframe;

Delays in annual allocation letters and payments from UK Gov has caused delay in project start dates, risk to LA to commit to projects before confirmation paperwork in place. Risk to project completion in remaining timeframe has been mitigated in 2023-24 due to confirmed carry forward in to 2024-25, allowing us to extend project timescales where delivery partners are in a position to do so. This however comes with additional challenge in year 3 2024-25, with a bottle neck effect on delivery in the final year of the programme.

A three-year approach to funding is extremely welcome however for any future arrangements there needs to be certainty across the three years at the outset, flexibility between financial years and prompt allocation.

The appropriateness of and flexibility provided by the UKSPF Interventions, Objectives, Outcomes and Outputs relevant for Scotland;

The additional option to report against different outcomes and outputs is useful. There should however be provision to suggest additional outcomes and outputs. Recording against the intervention rather than project can be challenging. Whilst these can provide a statistical measure they do not necessarily provide a good insight to the value of a specific intervention.

The adequacy of the administrative expenditure provisions

No particular comment as too early to say.

Multiply

School leavers age in Scotland is lower than England, UKSPF does not recognise this and therefore eligibility for Multiply provision in further education settings is impacted. Notification of expanding use of all Outputs and Outcomes across all Interventions has allowed more flexibility for projects

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