

Finance and Public Administration Committee

Replacing EU Structural Funds in Scotland

Written Submission from Angus Council

1. The approach taken to identifying areas of greater need or priority.

The approach taken by the Levelling Up was measured by an index targeting areas within England, Scotland, and Wales with the most significant need under three place themes: need for economic recovery and growth, need for improved transport connectivity, and need for regeneration. Using the index places throughout the UK were then placed into categories numbered 1,2, and 3 to identify the places with highest level of need. 1 being places categorised most in need.

Throughout the bid process concerns have been raised at the methodology and metrics approach used to prioritise places due the vast differences between nationally between urban and rural needs. The lack of GB wide data availability to measure the themes also meant that it was not possible to develop the indices in the same way for all England, Scotland and Wales.

2. The process of bidding for funding including the types of projects you sought funding for.

The bidding process was challenging, resource and time intensive from the announcement of funds to the deadline date. The weekly drop-in sessions with UK Government and Civil Servants were helpful to answer questions throughout the process, however due to the tight timescales and the complexity of the fund queries were often not answered fully at the time.

As deadlines for both funds were scheduled for the same day concerns were raised on the capacity of UK Government staff being able to assess the volume of bids and supporting evidence required in the timescales publicised.

It is also noted that the set deadline was one day after Scottish Government's deadline for the Regeneration Capital Grant Fund. Better coordination of major funding deadlines would be welcome.

Working in partnership with a local charity we sought funding for the Levelling Up fund to develop a new community facility at Arbroath. The facility is to be built from recycled low carbon material to create an exemplar demonstrator for the UK building

industry. The facility is to be situated in the North End of Arbroath, Angus which has among the highest poverty rates, generational unemployment, and health inequalities in Scotland.

3. How successful you have been at securing funding.

We were unsuccessful with our bid and await feedback from UK Government.

4. The appropriateness of any timescales and criteria which determine when, how and on what funding must be spent.

The timescales for both the Levelling Up Funds and Community Renewal Fund were challenging. Angus Council did not apply to the Community Renewal Fund due to the financial threshold required for bids. At a time when we are already trying to spend numerous Scottish Government funding streams targeting skills and employability our capacity to bid for new funds was too stretched. There is the additional burden for successful local authorities to have monies spent by 31st March 2021. Delays to the announcement of funding awards will have caused concern on deliverability of successful projects. Funding announcements were expected from July 2021 but not received until November.

5. What has worked well and what needs to be approved in terms of future funding approaches; including the extent to which the new and emerging (multi government) landscape of economic development will enable effective use of public funds.

The EU Structural funds works on a multi annual budget – 7 years- this works well as it has ensured the same legal and funding certainty beyond parliamentary terms. Therefore, adopting a similar timescale certainly at least 5 years for future funding (UKSPF) would allow time for programmes to deliver large scale projects which take time plan, deliver, and evaluate.

At this time, we have no indication of the deadline for second round nor if the criteria will remain the same.

Future funding should be determined by need at a regional or local level on an evidence-based approach.

Local decision making by partnerships of public, private and third sector representation. Within the existing delivery partners and local authorities there is a

wealth of experienced people who have delivered many EU programmes. Use the knowledge and skills of them to deliver future funding. It is vital to reduce bureaucracy and have simple administration processes at all levels of delivery, to ensure the focus is on delivery of projects rather than processes. Ensure the purpose and criteria for the Fund is clear from the outset as well the monitoring process.

Little or nothing is known about the assessment process or criteria and there was no opportunity to provide further information.

It was very disappointing to find out we had been unsuccessful through the public announcement and not in advance and would encourage more frequent and better communication with applicants.

6. The sustainability of funding for the longer term operation or project or capital investment delivered under these funds.

As above future funding programmes requires multi annual funding that allows projects time to plan, deliver and evaluate success.

7. The evaluation and accountability mechanisms in place or proposal the effectiveness of any funding provided.

At this point in time, it is difficult to comment on the evaluation of the Levelling Up Funds as round one projects have only been announced. Section 9.2 of the Levelling Up prospectus states that the Levelling Up Fund “will have a robust, coherent monitoring system. This will be built around a common understanding of outputs and outcomes sought through the fund”