

# CABINET



**URN: 23-186**

**Report Title: UKSPF People & Skills Commissioning Strategy**

**Report to: Executive Leadership Team and Cabinet**

**Date of meetings:**

**8 November 2023: ELT**

**4 December 2023: Cabinet**

**Responsible Cabinet Member: Cllr Daniel Candon**

**Responsible Director / Officer: Executive Director of Place, Natasha Hayes**

**Is this a Key decision? Yes**

**Date added to Forward Plan of Key Decisions if a Key Decision: 1 November 2023**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY / INTRODUCTION FROM CABINET MEMBER

This report sets out recommendations for the open, competitive commissioning of three interventions under the Council's approved UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) 'People & Skills' investment priority in 2024/25.

### RECOMMENDATIONS :

That Cabinet :

- Notes and approves the commissioning strategy set out in this report
- Delegates to officers the management of the open, competitive commissioning process described

## 1. Introduction

1.1. The approved Great Yarmouth UKSPF Investment Plan makes provision for three interventions under the 'People & Skills' Investment Priority in 2024/25, reflecting local needs. Summaries of the funding, guidance and associated outputs/outcomes are presented in the annex.

- E33: Employment Support for Economically Inactive Residents (£150,000 allocated)
- E35: Supporting Residents Furthest from the Labour Market (£80,000 allocated)
- E37: Tailored Support for Residents in Employment (£50,000 allocated)

1.2. In order to ensure the delivery of activity from April 2024, a commissioning strategy must be established. Key stakeholders, including the County Council and GY Skills Taskforce members have been consulted and this report provides Cabinet with recommendations for consideration.

1.3. As set out in the UKSPF Investment Plan, open competitive calls – effectively the packaging-up of specific budgets and associated outputs/outcomes and critically assessing submissions from third parties – are considered to be the most appropriate means of delivering interventions under the 'People & Skills' Investment Priority, where there are a number of established providers in the voluntary, public and private sectors representing established, projects currently or previously in receipt of EU ESF and other funding.

- 1.4. This approach would also encourage innovation in delivery, integrate best practice and maximise value for money. Ongoing reporting evaluation is implicit in provision of all contracted provision.

## **2. Work to Date / Proposal / Next Steps**

- 2.1. The Great Yarmouth Skills Taskforce – comprising local skills/employability stakeholders – led the prioritisation of interventions under the ‘People & Skills’ Investment Priority. It has a central role in the co-ordination of local skills interventions to improve access to and enhance the visibility/uptake of numerous local learning/upskilling/reskilling interventions to a) maximise social inclusion and the accessibility of local opportunities, and b) ensure that the jobs that employers need to fill are aligned to pathways for residents to access them.
- 2.2. Other bodies, such as the Town Board (which was augmented to meet the requirements of a UKSPF ‘Local Partnership Group’) and Great Yarmouth Health and Wellbeing Partnership – successor to the Great Yarmouth Locality Board and includes representation from elected members, council officers, colleges, hospitals, the police and voluntary sector – also had the opportunity to contribute.
- 2.3. The UKSPF-funded Skills Manager is in the process of drafting a new Skills & Employability Strategy and Action Plan for consideration. They and the Skills Taskforce also have an ongoing role in the strategic mapping of progression pathways based upon current and emerging skills support provision in the Borough.
- 2.4. Two pieces of UKSPF-funded and Taskforce-endorsed research have been procured; Neighbourly Lab is currently working on a) the identification and characterisation of local barriers to skills and education attainment and the critical success factors required to address them, and b) a strategic assessment of current/projected workforce and workforce segmentation needs. These will directly inform the detail of the competitive calls alongside the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) and Norfolk Strategic Skills Plan.
- 2.5. *Sections 3-5* set out the focus of each intervention and recommendations for the commissioning of corresponding activity, with a short executive summary provided at the top of each section. The following critical pathway summarises the relationship between the Skills and Employability Strategy, UKSPF interventions and ‘next step’ communication:

ELT: UKSPF commissioning strategy / Skills and Employability Strategy (update)	8 November 2023
Skills Taskforce: UKSPF commissioning strategy / Skills and Employability Strategy (update)	9 November 2023
Final reporting and integration of externally commissioned research	30 November 2023
Cabinet: UKSPF People and Skills commissioning strategy (decision)	4 December 2023
UKSPF / skills and employability communications release	5 December 2023
Skills Taskforce and NCC draft strategic objectives endorsement	15 January 2024

Leaders' meeting: themed activity – achieving objectives	30 January 2024
Draft Skills and Employability Strategy – internal circulation	31 January 2024
Launch of competitive calls for UKSPF-funded interventions	2 February 2024
ELT: Skills and Employability Strategy report presented	14 February 2024
Skills Taskforce: Skills and Employability Strategy and Action Plan presented	February 2024
Cabinet: Skills and Employability Strategy (decision)	4 March 2024
Procurement and contracting of UKSPF-funded interventions	March 2024
Launch of UKSPF-funded activity across all three interventions	April 2024

### 3. E33: Employment support for economically inactive residents (£150,000 allocated)

E33 Executive summary
<b>Description:</b> employment support for economically inactive people, with intensive and wrap-around one-to-one support to move people closer towards mainstream provision and employment, supplemented by additional and/or specialist life and basic skills support where there are local provision gaps
<b>Key considerations:</b> wrapping around – rather than replicating – new programmes, such as 'Working Well Norfolk', prioritising innovation in delivery and value for money
<b>Recommended commissioning strategy:</b> commission three providers, each with a value of £50,000, avoiding reliance upon a single provider/approach via an open competitive call for proposals

- 3.1. E33 is intended to provide intensive and tailored one-to-one employability support to move people closer towards mainstream provision and employment, supplemented by additional and/or specialist life and basic skills support where there are local provision gaps. This provision can include promoting the importance of work to help people to live healthier and more independent lives, alongside building future financial resilience and wellbeing.
- 3.2. The 16-24 year old cohort has emerged as a local priority, although cohorts may include, but are not limited to, people aged over 50, people with a disability or health condition, women, people from an ethnic minority, neuro-diverse, young people not in education, employment or training and people with multiple complex needs (homeless, care leavers, ex/offenders, people with substance abuse problems and victims of domestic violence).
- 3.3. Local economic inactivity rates compare unfavourably against other, similar areas. Working directly with these residents and, in some cases their families as well, to help them realise their potential can raise aspirations and improve their access to jobs. It's also desirable that intervention makes reference to parents' critical role in countering school-age absenteeism.

- 3.4. National research is examining the interplay of contributory factors to economic inactivity, providing a more comprehensive breakdown of the underlying reasons for economic inactivity – including mental health – over and above headline figures provided by the Office for National Statistics. This intervention seeks to address multiple employability barriers through referrals supporting benefit entitlements, healthcare and other support services in addition to education providers.
- 3.5. Furthermore, new data indicates disparities that emerged during the Pandemic that have not normalised yet – specifically, a significant increase in male economic inactivity compared to pre-Pandemic levels and other spatial benchmarks. This is an obvious focus for investigation and corrective intervention.
- 3.6. The ‘Working Well Norfolk’ project has emerged since the approval of UKSPF Investment Plan and will, undoubtedly, seek to engage similar target beneficiaries in terms of those self-declaring a health condition as the primary reason for economic inactivity. Other projects, including Work Well, will equally be monitored closely to mitigate duplication risk.
- 3.7. There will need to be close integration with alternative projects to ensure that eligible beneficiaries that are already well-supported are de-prioritised and that new intervention is complementary. Collaborative signposting and cross referrals are essential to ensure best-fit support is prioritised, duplication is avoided, and no one is left behind.
- 3.8. Engagement routes also include cross-referrals of individuals ineligible for other support, community services and active support providers (e.g. referrals from case workers, food banks and community hubs).
- 3.9. Similar projects have previously been undertaken via ESF, so good practice and lessons learned will need to be integrated into new provision. For example, in-project post-work support and post-project tracking data will be expectations. Support is also expected to be aimed at behaviours such as resilience and independence, where appropriate, focusing on the best interests of beneficiaries.
- 3.10. The recommendation is to commission three providers under this intervention, each with a value of £50,000, avoiding reliance upon a single provider/approach. An open competitive call for proposals should prioritise innovation in delivery, value for money in terms of delivering contracted UKSPF outputs/outcomes and adding value to other complementary schemes. Selected proposals could reflect, for example, different approaches and discrete beneficiary cohorts.
- 3.11. Delivery could be undertaken by established providers or consortia in the voluntary, public and private sectors representing established, successful projects or new entrants seeking to replicate best practice elsewhere.

**4. E35: Supporting residents furthest from the labour market (£80,000 allocated)**

E35 Executive summary
<b>Description:</b> tailored support to help people into employment, who are not supported by mainstream provision to address barriers to accessing education and training courses

**Key considerations:** alignment with the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), integration of 'soft skills' into job-specific work placements, prioritising innovation in delivery, value for money and adding value to other complementary schemes

**Recommended commissioning strategy:** commission either two providers via an open competitive call for proposals, each with a value of £40,000 or a single provider/approach to ensure the best possible integration of the two core elements with this intervention

- 4.1. E35 is intended to support and motivate participants into the workplace by way of 'tasting' the work environment and developing their employability/soft skills to enable 'work readiness'. This will support local employers in terms of recruitment, productivity, and staff retention.
- 4.2. This will necessitate broad employment engagement focused upon 'opening new doors' for relevant work experience opportunities aligned to current/emerging labour force needs (Paragraph 2.4) . A key local challenge is engaging employers in the facilitation of supported work placements and volunteering which will be achieved by supporting them through processes/administration and overcoming adverse preconceptions that disincentivise participation.
- 4.3. 'New doors' must include traditionally hard-to-reach sectors, such as those with elevated health and safety risk and SMEs and include cohorts requiring additional support. This intervention will also focus on expanding work placements directly related to specific job-matching. An objective of this intervention is to promote the benefits of facilitating work experience within the local area to maximise long-term opportunity for wider education and support providers.
- 4.4. Aligning to the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), 'soft skills' are a primary solution to recruitment and retention challenges. Responding to local research, this work will focus on communication skills, teamwork, problem solving and time management alongside recognised needs such as digitalisation in the workplace. This standalone provision aims to prepare participants ahead of work-placements and/or interviews and will equally support transitioning between sectors/industries. Post-project findings will inform future LSIP strategy.
- 4.5. Designed through employer voice, the 'soft skills' element will evolve and adapt through participant feedback. The final version will be the 'property' of the Great Yarmouth Skills Taskforce and accessible throughout the wider local stakeholder network. This 'shared resource' will support future participants across the wider skills and employability network and provide continuing professional development (CPD) for practitioners across all age groups and cohorts.
- 4.6. Where work-experience is either inaccessible or less appropriate for participants, volunteering is an acceptable alternative for observing, practicing and developing soft-skills. The expectation of this project is that all beneficiaries have a work-placement or volunteering experience and the soft skills module delivery.
- 4.7. During this process, providers are expected to extend quality careers guidance to participants and, wherever possible, job-match work-placements/volunteering aligning personal aspirations with current/emerging local skills gaps. Beneficiaries will receive information, advice or guidance (IAG) preferably undertaken on employers' sites.

- 4.8. The combination of the skills development and work/volunteering experience will result in personal beneficiary action/development plans, including education/skills and matched-education/training/career routes corresponding to local workforce needs.
- 4.9. The recommendation is to either commission two providers under this intervention, each with a value of £40,000 or a single provider/approach, which might ensure better integration of the two core aspects of this intervention. As proposed for E33, a competitive call for proposals should prioritise innovation in delivery, value for money in terms of delivering contracted UKSPF outputs/outcomes and adding value to other complementary schemes. Selected proposals could reflect, for example, different industrial groups.

**5. E37: Tailored Support for Residents in Employment (£50,000 allocated)**

E37 Executive summary
<b>Description:</b> a smaller package of tailored support to help people in employment to address barriers to accessing education and training courses, supporting the retention of groups who are likely to leave the labour market early
<b>Key considerations:</b> wrapping around, rather than replicating other programmes, such as Norfolk County Council's 'Multiply', prioritising innovation in delivery and value for money
<b>Recommended commissioning strategy:</b> commission a single providers/scheme with a value of £50,000 via an open competitive call for proposals

- 5.1. E37 is intended to provide tailored support to help people in employment to address barriers to accessing education and training courses. This includes supporting the retention of groups who are likely to leave the labour market early, for example, 'under-employed' residents and those vulnerable to 'technological unemployment', displacement through automation/digitalisation or seasonal factors.
- 5.2. Delivery will need to wrap around the County-administered 'Multiply' programme, which provides adult learning including those already in employment. There are also projects/programmes with pre-existing delivery models and established relationships with employers which, with modest re-focussing, may be able to provide the support required.
- 5.3. Whereas Multiply is focused on adult numeracy, this support will address alternative skills gaps, such as literacy/ESOL/digital, which present barriers to developing further sector skills, including mandatory licenses to practice. For example, language barriers impact mandatory health and safety understanding and digital skills limit some over-50s. Basic skills provision is a natural enabler for wider vocational upskilling activity and will support participation in advanced learning.
- 5.4. Non-flexible provision can be a major barrier to employer engagement in terms of reskilling/upskilling their workforce. This funding stream may bridge gaps between employer operational needs and that of providers requiring cost-efficient enrolment numbers and fixed qualification frameworks. Provision will be tailored to employer expectations in terms of delivery times and venues encouraging employer sited learning which further supports associated cost and time to widen participation.

- 5.5. The recommendation is to commission a single £50,000 scheme, focussing on engaging with employers to provide complimentary provision supporting wider participation in organisation/sector specific upskilling. Initial engagement/participation in the skills system will support and motivate employers to ‘unlock potential’ towards work-place progression, including apprenticeships and higher education.

## **6. Financial Implications**

- 6.1. UKSPF revenue funding is secured and allocated to interventions E33, E35 and E37 as summarised in Paragraph 1.1. No Council funding is required. A failure to spend allocated monies on the interventions outlined by the end of March 2025 would result in the de-allocation of some or all the £280,000 awarded by the Government.

## **7. Risk Implications**

- 7.1. A key capacity challenge relates to local need/demand and the budget available under UKSPF. There is considerable thematic ground to cover – especially when the need to include backfilling successful projects/programmes whose funding is being wound down is considered. The UKSPF resources available to the Council are likely to be insufficient to offset the tapering-out of EU ESF funding. Competitive tendering will confer only partial mitigation against this.
- 7.2. In terms of commissioning activity, duplication is the primary risk. The evaluation of proposals will need to take account of new funding and new projects emerging since the mapping that informed the UKSPF Investment Plan submitted in August 2022. The involvement of the Skills Taskforce in the review of draft calls will largely mitigate this risk.
- 7.3. The distribution/delegation of public funding to third parties confers risk. Due diligence on and the selection and appointment of delivery partners and contractors provides a first line of defence. Compliant contractual procedures and mechanisms for the cascading of funding and explicit, evidenced deliverables, outputs and outcomes to trusted third parties are already in place.

## **8. Legal Implications**

- 8.1. Delivery of the approved UKSPF Investment Plan is the subject of an MoU signed by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and the Council on 13 December 2022.
- 8.2. The competitive tendering of the requirements set out in respect of E33, E35 and E37 will need to comply with applicable procurement provisions. An open, competitive tendering process – rather than direct award – will also help to ensure that the Council’s subsidy control obligations are met.

## **9. Conclusion**

- 9.1 This report sets out recommendations for the open, competitive commissioning of three interventions under the UKSPF ‘People & Skills’ investment priority in 2024/25. It is recommended that management of the competitive commissioning process along the lines outlined is delegated to officers, with the evaluation of proposals and awarding of contracts undertaken by a panel comprising: GYBC (director level) and Skills Taskforce members from NCC, LSIP, DWP and resident representation.

## 10. Background Papers

**Annex: Summaries of the three 'People & Skills' interventions, including associated budgets and outputs/outcomes.**

*Areas of consideration: e.g. does this report raise any of the following issues and if so how have these been considered/mitigated against?*

Consultations	Comment
Monitoring Officer Consultation:	As part of ELT review
Section 151 Officer Consultation:	As part of ELT review
Existing Council Policies:	The approved UKSPF Investment Plan
Equality Issues/EQIA assessment:	EQIA to be undertaken at the point of procurement inception