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**Shropshire Council
UK Shared Prosperity Fund Programme
Evaluation**

Delivery Area: Shropshire

March 2026



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CONSULTING



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Executive Summary

Context

In September 2025, Shropshire Council commissioned Paula Rogers Consulting to evaluate delivery of the Shropshire UKSPF and the Rural Fund up to 31 March 2025. Collectively referred to as 'the Programme', the two Funds represent a combined investment of £13.4 million aimed at building pride in place, increasing life chances and strengthening local economic resilience across Shropshire. The evaluation examines delivery across the three UKSPF Investment Priorities, these being Communities and Place, Supporting Local Business and People and Skills and assesses the complementary role of the Rural Fund in supporting rural communities and enterprises.

The evaluation has reviewed programme performance in terms of expenditure, outputs, outcomes and value for money. Evidence has been gathered through analysis of management data, documentation and stakeholder consultations, including discussions with key Council Officers and the Shropshire Economic Partnership (SEP) Board, alongside survey feedback from funded providers. Case studies have been used to illustrate the impact of local interventions and identify the factors contributing to effective delivery and outcomes.

Findings from the evaluation are intended to inform both national and local learning. They will contribute to the Government's wider evaluation of the UKSPF while helping Shropshire Council and local partners to identify what has worked well, what challenges were encountered and how future regeneration and renewal programmes can build on this experience.

Relevance

The Programme was developed from a robust evidence base, reflecting Shropshire's distinctive economic, demographic and geographic profile. It addressed issues such as an ageing and dispersed population, low productivity, workforce shortages, limited connectivity and rural isolation, while capitalising on opportunities to strengthen community assets, support business diversification and grow the green and visitor economies.

The open call process adopted by Shropshire Council supported fairness, transparency and geographic balance, with projects spanning community infrastructure, cultural engagement, business innovation and employability support. The External Funding and Technical Lead Officer said that this approach 'was recognised both internally and externally as a great success, being structured, fair and auditable'.

While delivery was largely effective and achieved wide thematic and geographic reach, Technical Officers noted that the late approval of funding and phased sequencing of Calls constrained opportunities for integration across Priorities. Nevertheless, the Programme delivered significant local outcomes, built organisational capacity and generated valuable learning for future funding rounds.

Key lessons include the need for earlier planning, longer delivery windows and more coordinated, cross-priority Calls to maximise alignment, sustainability and long-term impact across Shropshire's communities, businesses and residents.

Performance

Despite a delayed start and a compressed delivery period, the Programme achieved a high level of financial delivery overall. By 31 March 2025, 92.6% of the Main UKSPF Programme allocation and 80.9% of the Rural Fund allocation had been spent, equating to 90.4% of the combined target. This represents a notable achievement given the scale and complexity of managing multiple Investment Priorities, capital and revenue budgets and parallel delivery of the Rural Fund. Overall, expenditure performance reflects effective financial oversight and delivery capacity within a challenging timeframe.

Output performance was generally high across Communities and Place, Supporting Local Business and People and Skills, with many interventions exceeding participation, engagement and activity targets. Significant levels of community involvement, cultural activity, business advisory support, innovation uptake and skills participation were achieved. In several areas, high engagement levels were achieved early with longer-term outcomes, such as sustained employment, business growth and increased footfall, expected to materialise over time.

Where outcome measures remain below target, this largely reflects the longer timescales associated with capital investment and economic or labour market change. Overall, the Programme has delivered wide reach, early evidence of impact and a solid foundation for continued benefits beyond the formal funding period.

Impact

Despite a compressed delivery period, the Main UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund have delivered clear and wide-ranging impacts across Shropshire's communities, businesses and residents. Through a combination of place-based capital investment, targeted business support, skills intervention and employability support, the Programme has generated tangible short- and medium-term benefits, with further impacts expected to continue to emerge beyond the formal funding period.

Shropshire Council's local oversight played a key role in shaping impact, enabling funding to be aligned with local priorities, mobilised quickly and managed transparently. This approach supported effective management of public funds, high levels of partner engagement and flexible delivery across all three Investment Priorities.

Revenue and capital investment under Communities and Place delivered visible improvements to community facilities, cultural assets, green spaces and public realm, alongside high levels of participation in cultural and community activity. These interventions strengthened volunteering, organisational capacity and local pride, while establishing foundations for longer-term outcomes such as increased usage, footfall and wellbeing.

The Supporting Local Business Investment Priority generated significant economic benefits, with extensive enterprise engagement, innovation support and grant funding. Businesses reported improved productivity, resilience and confidence, alongside job creation and early growth outcomes. Capital investment, through the Rural Fund, supported rural businesses to modernise, adopt new technologies and improve operational efficiency, with further economic impacts expected to accrue over time.

Within People and Skills, interventions supported economically inactive and working residents to improve employability, gain qualifications, develop essential and vocational skills and enhance digital inclusion and capacity. Participants progressed into employment pathways and demonstrated improved readiness for work, recognising that sustained employment outcomes require longer-term engagement.

Looking ahead, the evaluation highlights that future impact will be influenced not only by the choice of interventions, but also by programme design and delivery conditions. Longer delivery timescales, proportionate monitoring and reporting and structured opportunities for collaboration and shared learning would support delivery partners to plan more effectively, embed activity and maximise long-term outcomes. Overall, the Programme has provided a firm platform for future investment by improving places, supporting jobs, developing businesses and improving workforce skills and employability across Shropshire.

Management and Delivery

The Shropshire UKSPF Investment Programme was delivered through a structured governance and operational framework, overseen by the Shropshire Economic Partnership (SEP) Board, which included public, private, education and voluntary sector representatives. The Board provided strategic oversight, ensuring alignment with the Economic Growth Strategy 2022–27, while Shropshire Council retained final approval and contracting authority. Three Delivery Groups initially supported project Calls across the Investment Priorities: Communities and Place; Supporting Local Business and People and Skills. The Business and Place Groups were later disbanded due to inconsistent attendance, leaving the Skills Group to continue with broader representation.

Programme delivery was coordinated by an experienced and capable UKSPF Programme Team, led by the External Funding and Technical Lead Officer and supported by three Technical Officers, alongside Finance and Legal Services. The Team managed Calls, appraisals, contracting, monitoring, compliance and reporting to DLUHC/MHCLG. Despite compressed timescales, complex capital and revenue streams and high administrative demands, the Programme successfully met spend requirements and delivered tangible outcomes across all Investment Priorities, including accessible support that complemented and reinforced national and local strategies.

The Programme also highlighted practical lessons for future delivery. Clear role definitions, early mobilisation, dedicated staffing, proportionate change-control mechanisms and integrated cross-team coordination were critical to maintaining momentum and managing risk. Longer programme durations, smaller governance groups and realistic timelines for capital-intensive projects would further enhance efficiency and impact. Overall, the Programme demonstrated effective management, robust governance and adaptability, delivering meaningful benefits to communities, businesses and skills development while promoting equality, inclusion and local strategic priorities.

Value for Money

The Shropshire UKSPF Programme delivered a credible level of Value for Money despite compressed delivery timescales and external economic pressures. Across the three Investment Priorities, the Programme combined competitive commissioning, intermediary-led delivery and use of established local partners to maximise reach and impact while controlling costs. Partners' existing infrastructure, networks and delivery experience reduced mobilisation costs and enabled a high proportion of funding to reach frontline activity quickly.

Total expenditure across the Main UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund reached over 90% of allocations, reflecting effective financial management and rapid mobilisation under a challenging timeframe. In addition, the Programme successfully secured significant third-party match funding, including private sources, Shropshire Council and other government funding programmes, enhancing leverage and enabling a greater scale and quality of interventions than could have been achieved through UKSPF resources alone. This additional investment amplified social, economic and environmental benefits, supporting local businesses, communities and skills development.

Efficiency was achieved through intermediary delivery models, coordination between partners and focus on enhancing existing assets rather than creating wholly new provision. Effectiveness is demonstrated through high additionality, outcomes exceeding expectations in business support, community participation and skills and employment development and the creation of full-time equivalent jobs contributing to local economic growth. Equity was embedded across the Programme, with targeted support for rural areas, underserved communities and under-represented groups, alongside alignment with the Council's Social Value Framework.

Overall, the evidence indicates that the Programme optimised resources, maximised impact and delivered significant Value for Money for Shropshire.

Conclusions

This Evaluation concludes that the Shropshire UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund were highly relevant to local needs and well aligned with national priorities and local strategic objectives. The Programme responded effectively to Shropshire’s distinctive challenges, including rural isolation, workforce shortages, low productivity and limited connectivity, through a coherent, place-based approach spanning Communities and Place, Supporting Local Business, People and Skills and the Rural Fund. Robust use of local data and intelligence ensured that interventions addressed identified gaps and emerging needs.

Despite a delayed start and compressed delivery timescales, the Programme achieved notable financial and operational performance, with over 90% expenditure across both funds and generally positive output delivery. Impact was most evident where projects were delivered by trusted local organisations and where interventions were targeted and flexible, generating meaningful short- and medium-term outcomes across communities, businesses and individuals. Many longer-term impacts are expected to continue to emerge beyond programme closure.

Locally managed, partnership-led delivery added clear value, supported by an experienced Programme Team, established partnerships and robust programme management systems. However, programme design complexity, compressed timescales and governance arrangements influenced delivery effectiveness, limiting opportunities for integration, shared learning and agile decision-making. Overall, the Programme delivered credible value for money, acting as a catalyst for wider social, economic and environmental benefits. Looking ahead, future place-based programmes would benefit from longer delivery periods, proportionate governance and administration, enhanced cross-priority coordination and improved mechanisms to capture wider outcomes, interim and longer-term impact.

1. Context

1.1 Context - Introduction

1.1.1 In September 2025, Paula Rogers Consulting was commissioned by Shropshire Council to undertake an evaluation of the Shropshire UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) covering activity up to 31 March 2025. For the purposes of this evaluation, the Shropshire UKSPF is referred to as ‘the Main UKSPF Programme’ and the REPF as ‘the Rural Fund’. When discussed collectively, they are referred to as ‘the Programme’.

1.1.2 The evaluation examines the performance of the Main UKSPF Programme across its three Investment Priorities, these being Communities and Place, Supporting Local Business and People and Skills. It also examines the contribution of the Rural Fund, which supports the Communities and Place and Supporting Local Business Investment Priorities. The different sections within the evaluation examines the Programme’s relevance, performance against expenditure and achievement of outputs and outcomes. It draws on feedback from project deliverers to assess impact, as well as insights from those involved in programme delivery to review management and delivery arrangements. The evaluation also includes an assessment of value for money and concludes with a summary of key findings and considerations for future programme design and delivery.

1.2 Objectives of the Evaluation

1.2.1 The evaluation will enable the Programme to feed into national strategies or evaluations, but also identify what local interventions have worked, in what context and by what means.

1.2.2 The Evaluation will:

- Review the effectiveness and impact of the local programme management and delivery that will enable Shropshire Council to feedback into the national evaluation process;
- Report on the effectiveness of interventions adopted as part of the UKSPF Submission; and
- Highlight any learning that will shape future delivery of regeneration and renewal programmes.

1.2.3 On 9 July 2024 the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) was renamed to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). For consistency, the evaluation will refer to ‘DLUHC’ prior to 9 July 2024 and ‘MHCLG’ after 9 July 2024.

1.2.4 The intended audience of the Evaluation is the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and Shropshire as the Lead Local Authority. Other interested partners include the Shropshire Economic Partnership (SEP) Board and organisations delivering community activity, business support and skills and employment initiatives in Shropshire. The Evaluation provides the relevant information for the audience to understand how the Programme and its Projects performed between 5 December 2022 and 31 March 2025.

1.3 Evaluation Methodology

1.3.1 Documentation and data review have been undertaken to provide an understanding of the Programme’s:

- Aims and objectives
- Management and delivery structure
- Impact in terms of forecasted and achieved spend and outputs

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1.3.2 The documentation and data reviewed includes:

- Shropshire Investment Plan
- DLUHC/MHCLG Reporting - Programme Returns and Change Requests
- Reports to the SEP Board
- Internal monitoring and evaluation

1.3.3 Staff consultations conducted are listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Consultations Undertaken

Internal – Shropshire Council	
Service Manager - Economy, Funding and Skills	Matt Potts
External Funding and Technical Lead Officer	Gary Spence
Communities and Place, Supporting Local Business and People and Skills Technical Officers	Hannah Smith, Joy Holland, Amy Farley
Growth and Infrastructure Team	Emma Chapman, Sarah Dodds
Strategic Financial Accountant	Nicola Higgins
External	
Chair of the SEP Board	Jeannie McGillivray

1.3.4 In November 2025, online surveys were distributed to providers delivering project activities across Shropshire to gather feedback on the outcomes, impacts and challenges of the projects they delivered. Some providers delivered more than one project. Responses were received from 32 providers, enabling valuable insights into the effectiveness of the initiatives. The number of surveys circulated and the response rates for each of the three Investment Priorities are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Provider Survey Response Rates

Investment Priorities	Numbers of Providers Surveyed	Completed Surveys	Response rate (%)
Communities and Place	22	16	73%
Supporting Local Business	24	13	54%
People and Skills	4	3	75%

1.3.5 In addition, all 50 project providers were contacted and asked to submit a short summary of their project’s impact. In total, 28 project deliverers responded, representing an excellent response rate of 55%.

A list of projects supported, together with delivery organisations, the Investment Priority under each was funded and the amount of UKSPF allocated at point of approval is provided in Appendix 1.

1.4 Policy Context – National UKSPF

1.4.1 UKSPF was launched in April 2022 as part of the previous UK Government’s Levelling Up agenda and represents a significant component of its investment in local places across the UK. UKSPF provided £2.6 billion of new funding for local investment by March 2025.

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1.4.2 UKSPF replaced the European Structural and Investment Programme (ESIF) as the Government’s domestic funding mechanism, providing local authorities with resources to support communities and place, businesses and people and skills. It aimed to deliver the Government’s wider commitment to level up all parts of the UK by addressing the four Levelling Up objectives:

- Boost productivity, pay, jobs and living standards by growing the private sector, especially in those places where they are lagging
- Spread opportunities and improve public services, especially in those places where they are weakest
- Restore a sense of community, local pride and belonging, especially in those places where they have been lost
- Empower local leaders and communities, especially in those places lacking local agency

1.4.3 The primary goal of UKSPF was to build pride in place and increase life chances across the UK, aligning closely with Levelling Up White Paper missions:

‘By 2030, pride in place, such as people’s satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community, will have risen in every area of the UK, with the gap between the top performing and other areas closing’.

Appendix 2 provides the High level UKSPF Logic Model that set out the missions, alongside Central Government and Local Place Inputs, Interventions, Outputs, Outcomes and Impacts.

1.4.4 Underneath the overarching objective of building pride in place and increasing life chances, UKSPF was structured around three Investment Priorities: Communities and Place; Supporting Local Business and People and Skills. Each Priority contained a defined set of objectives aligned with the relevant Levelling Up White Paper missions. Appendix 3 provides the defined set of objectives and the missions within the UKSPF Investment Priorities

1.4.5 REPF

Announced in September 2022, the Rural Fund was a complementary funding stream to the UKSPF. It provided capital investment for rural areas across England to improve productivity, strengthen communities and support economic growth. The Fund allocated £110 million nationally for the period 2023–2025 and served as the domestic successor to elements of the former EU-funded LEADER and Growth Programme schemes.

1.4.6 Administered by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) the Rural Fund was made available to eligible local authorities as an addendum to their UKSPF investment plans. It focused exclusively on capital projects and aligned with two of the three UKSPF Investment Priorities, these being Communities and Place and Supporting Local Business.

1.4.7 The Rural Fund enabled local authorities to invest in:

- Communities and Place: investment in community infrastructure and local assets, such as village halls, community hubs and small-scale tourism or heritage improvements that contributed to rural vitality; and
- Supporting Local Business: capital grants to micro and small rural enterprises to enhance productivity, innovation and diversification (for example, equipment upgrades, premises improvements and farm diversification).

1.4.8 In Shropshire, the Rural Fund was used to complement the Main UKSPF Programme by extending support to smaller rural settlements and enterprises that might otherwise have

limited access to local growth funding. Together, the Main UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund formed an integrated investment programme aimed at improving prosperity, resilience and quality of life across both urban and rural parts of Shropshire.

1.4.9 National Growth and Industrial Strategy

‘Invest 2035: The UK’s Modern Industrial Strategy’ began its life as a Green Paper (published October 2024) outlining its long-term vision for economic growth and industrial development, aiming to position the UK a global leader in innovation and high-value industries. Since then, in June 2025, the government published a formal Industrial Strategy that builds on the Green Paper’s proposals and sets out concrete commitments and mechanisms for implementation. The strategy is still structured around four key pillars:

- i. Innovation: Encourages increased investment in research and development (R&D) and promotes technological advancements across sectors like artificial intelligence, robotics and clean energy. It emphasises the importance of partnerships between businesses, academia and government to drive innovation and make the UK a hub for cutting-edge industries.
- ii. People: Focuses on developing a skilled workforce, supporting lifelong learning and addressing skills shortages in key industries. It aims to improve education and training opportunities, particularly in STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) and enhance vocational training.
- iii. Infrastructure: Prioritises investment in modern infrastructure, such as transportation, digital connectivity and sustainable energy. The strategy aims to create a more integrated and efficient infrastructure network to support economic growth and reduce regional disparities.
- iv. Business Environment: Seeks to create a competitive business landscape by improving regulations, supporting entrepreneurship and attracting foreign investment. It includes measures to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and facilitate access to finance.

The Strategy also emphasises sustainability, aiming for net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 through investments in clean energy technologies and green industries. It represents a forward-looking plan designed to foster innovation and environmental responsibility.

1.4.10 The principles within ‘Invest 2035’ complement the objectives of both the UKSPF and the Rural Fund. Its focus on innovation, infrastructure and place-based growth aligns closely with the Funds’ aims to:

- Strengthen rural economies through investment in small business productivity and diversification;
- Support rural infrastructure, including digital connectivity and sustainable transport;
- Promote inclusive skills development and employment opportunities; and
- Contribute to the transition towards a low-carbon, net-zero economy.

Together, these policy frameworks reinforce the Government’s overarching ambition to boost local economic resilience and ensure that both urban and rural areas can contribute fully to the UK’s long-term growth trajectory.

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1.5 Policy Context – Local

- 1.5.1 The Shropshire UKSPF Investment Plan sets out the local challenges, opportunities and priorities that have shaped the content of all projects delivered under both the Main UKSPF Programme and the Rural Fund. Each project has contributed to the overarching UKSPF goal of ‘building pride in place and increasing life chances’, while also supporting delivery of the wider Levelling Up missions.
- 1.5.2 The Investment Priorities and project activities align closely with Shropshire Council’s strategic objectives and key local policies, including:
- The Shropshire Plan (2022–2025) and Corporate Plan - setting out the Council’s overarching vision for a healthy economy and thriving communities;
 - Economic Growth Strategy (2022–2027) - providing a framework for business growth, innovation and skills development;
 - Commissioning for the Future (2014) - establishing principles for outcome-based investment and partnership delivery;
 - Vibrant Shropshire: The Cultural Strategy (2021–2031) - highlighting the role of creativity and culture in place-making and wellbeing;
 - Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (2020) - underpinning commitments to a net zero carbon county; and
 - Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2022–2027) - supporting inclusive growth and improved quality of life.
- 1.5.3 The design and delivery of Shropshire’s UKSPF and Rural Fund investments reflect a close alignment between national and local priorities. Nationally, both Funds have contributed to the Government’s Levelling Up and Invest 2035 ambitions by promoting productivity, sustainability and inclusive growth. Locally, these ambitions have been translated into place-based action that has addressed the specific challenges of a large, sparsely populated rural county including connectivity, access to services, business resilience and community vitality.

The Rural Fund, in particular, complemented the Main UKSPF Programme by targeting rural capital investment that helped to sustain local enterprises, improve community infrastructure, enhance quality of life in villages and market towns and promote community infrastructure. Together, they formed an integrated approach to achieving Shropshire’s long-term economic, environmental and social goals.

1.6 Programme Context

- 1.6.1 The Memorandum of Understanding between The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Shropshire Council (Lead Authority) was awarded on 5 December 2022 with approval for the Rural Fund addendum following in May 2023.

Shropshire was allocated £13,434,720. This comprised £10,845,217 from the Main UKSPF Programme and £2,589,503 from the Rural Fund. Within the Main UKSPF Programme the majority of the funding (£5,900,000, 54.4%) was allocated for projects within the Supporting Local Business Investment Priority followed by Communities and Place (£3,345,217, 30.8%) and People and Skills (£1,600,000, 14.8%). Funding was divided into Revenue (£8,645,217) and Capital (£2,200,000) with Communities and Place being the only Investment Priority to receive a capital allocation from the Main UKSPF Programme. All of the Rural Fund was capital funding and was split between Supporting Rural Communities Investment Priority (£1,589,503, 61.4%) and Supporting Rural Business (£1,000,000, 38.6%).

1.6.2 In the first two years of the Main UKSPF Programme’s delivery (2022/23 and 2023/24) it focused on delivering the Supporting Local Business and Communities and Place Investment Priorities. The People and Skills Investment Priority was programmed to commence in 2023/24 to avoid overlap with existing EU-funded employment and skills provision which was still active during the early years of UKSPF. The original contracted allocations for the Main UKSPF Programme were split into the three financial years (2022/2023, 2023/2024 and 2024/2025) and are provided in Table 3. The original contracted allocations for the Rural Fund were split into two financial years (2023/2024 and 2024/2025) and are provided in Table 4.

Table 3: Main UKSPF Programme - Original Profiled Spend (Capital and Revenue)

Investment Priority	2022/2023		2023/2024		2024/2025		Total Allocation and %
	CAP	REV	CAP	REV	CAP	REV	
Communities and Place	£131,617	£179,500	£342,203	£339,217	£1,726,180	£626,500	£3,345,217 (30.8%)
	£311,117		£681,420		£2,352,680		
Supporting Local Business	£0	£1,005,050	£0	£1,545,914	£0	£3,349,036	£5,900,000 (54.4%)
	£1,005,050		£1,545,914		£3,349,036		
People and Skills	£0	£0	£0	£405,000	£0	£1,195,000	£1,600,000 (14.8%)
	£0		£405,000		£1,195,000		
Total Allocation	£131,617	£1,184,550	£342,203	£2,290,131	£1,726,180	£5,170,536	£10,845,217 (100%)
	£1,316,167		£2,632,334		£6,896,716		

Table 4: Rural Fund – Original Profiled Spend (Capital)

Investment Priority	2023/2024 (CAP)	2024/2025 (CAP)	Total Allocation and %
Communities and Place	£589,503	£1,000,000	£1,589,503 (61.4%)
Supporting Local Business	£300,000	£700,000	£1,000,000 (38.6%)
Total Allocation	£859,503	£1,700,000	£2,589,503 (100%)

1.6.3 To access the Main UKSPF Programme, Shropshire Council was required to submit an Investment Plan by 1 August 2022. This plan set out how funding would be used across the three national priorities: Community and Place, Supporting Local Business and People and Skills. In November 2022, DEFRA offered rural authorities an additional ‘top up’ through the Rural Fund, which was secured by submitting an addendum to the original Investment Plan. The Main UKSPF Programme was approved in December 2022 and the Rural Fund addendum was incorporated 1 April 2023.

1.6.4 The Investment Plan was informed by consultation and development work with local stakeholders. National guidance required the Investment Plan to be signed off by a local governance group prior to submission. In Shropshire, this role was taken on by the Shropshire SEP Board, which continued to provide oversight of the Programme’s delivery.

1.6.5 The total allocation was distributed across all three Investment Priorities, with the Investment Plan setting out a range of Intervention areas under each theme, as defined by Government guidance. In addition, the Rural Fund supported the Communities and Place and Supporting Local Business Investment Priorities.

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- 1.6.6 Following Government approval for the Investment Plan in December 2022, working alongside the SEP Board, the Council established an open application process for awarding funds locally. The process was also used for the Rural Fund.
- 1.6.7 In the October 2024 Budget, Government announced that UKSPF would be extended by a further year to March 2026 and in December 2024 an additional £4.2m was awarded to Shropshire for delivery in 2025/26. Subsequently, Government confirmed an extension of the Programme’s funding period to allow spend up to 30 September 2026, although no additional funding was made available for this extended period. This extension period does not form part of the scope of this evaluation.
- 1.6.8 DLUHC recognised the very late start to the Programme and, following a request to amend the Memorandum of Understanding in May 2023, approval was granted in July 2023 to roll over funding into 2024/2025 in the Main UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund. The re-profiled spend is detailed in Tables 5 and 6. The Main Fund included 4%¹ allowance towards management and administration costs. The Revised Profile Spend combines 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 expenditure.

Table 5: Main UKSPF Programme Revised Profile Spend July 2023 (Including Management and Admin)

Investment Priority	2022/2023		2023/2024		2024/2025		Total Allocation
	CAP	REV	CAP	REV	CAP	REV	
Management and Admin		£25,571		£171,747		£236,490.68	£433,808.68
Communities and Place		£14,687	£199,419.24	£335,687.68	£1,569,952.47	£1,197,183.57	£3,316,929.96
		£14,687		£535,106.92		£2,767,136.04	
Supporting Local Business	£50,708	£172,391	£20,193.70	£703,150.77	£359,726.59	£4,170,461.73	£5,476,631.79
		£223,099		£723,344.47		£4,530,188.32	
People and Skills				£286,914.12		£1,330,932.45	£1,617,846.57
				£286,914.12		£1,330,932.45	
Total Allocation	£50,708	£212,649	£219,613	£1,497,500	£1,929,679	£6,935,068	£10,845,217

Table 6: Rural Fund Revised Profile Spend July 2023 (Capital)

Investment Priority	2023/2024	2024/2025	Total Allocation
Supporting Rural Communities	£34,573.75	£1,698,103.25	£1,732,677
Supporting Rural Business	£81,528.13	£775,297.87	£856,826
Total Allocation	£116,101.88	£2,473,401.12	£2,589,503

1.7 Contracting Process

- 1.7.1 UKSPF is a delegated fund, meaning that local lead authorities are responsible for determining how the funding is allocated and managed within their area. Lead authorities are able to procure, commission, deliver in-house or run competitive bidding processes in line with their Investment Plans and governance frameworks.

¹ UKSPF provides each lead local authority in England, Scotland and Wales to use up to 4% of their allocation by default to undertake necessary Fund administration, such as project assessment, contracting, monitoring and evaluation and ongoing stakeholder engagement.

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- 1.7.2 Shropshire Council adopted a competitive call and application process to identify and select projects for funding. This approach was designed to ensure transparency, fairness and alignment with both local priorities and the objectives set out in the national UKSPF and Rural REPF prospectuses.

For the People and Skills, particularly those requiring specialist expertise or where direct delivery was more efficient, the Council also used procurement and commissioning routes. This blended model ensured flexibility in delivery while maintaining robust governance and accountability.

- 1.7.3 Working in partnership with the Shropshire Economic Partnership (SEP) Board, the Council developed and publicised an open call for applications. Delivery Groups were established for each Investment Priority, bringing together Council Officers and representative organisations to shape the Calls. These were promoted widely across the County to encourage applications from a diverse range of potential delivery organisations, including community groups, local businesses, FE and HE, training providers, voluntary and charitable organisations and internal Council services.

- 1.7.4 All applications received, including those submitted by internal Council teams, were subject to a consistent appraisal and scoring process. Applications were assessed against set criteria, which included:

- Strategic fit with the UKSPF and REPF investment priorities and Shropshire's Investment Plan;
- Deliverability and value for money;
- Contribution to local needs and outcomes such as building pride in place, supporting business growth and enhancing skills; and
- Capacity, governance and risk management.

- 1.7.5 Appraisals were carried out by both Council Officers and independent assessors. Each application was scored against criteria including need, impact, strategic fit, sustainable development, equality and diversity, outputs and outcomes and budget. Following appraisal, the scores were reviewed by a panel made up of representatives from the SEP Board Delivery Groups, who agreed recommendations for the SEP Board to consider. The SEP Board then reviewed these recommendations for endorsement before the proposals proceeded through the Council's internal governance process for final approval.

- 1.7.6 Successful applicants were issued with an outcome notification, followed by a standstill period before Grant Funding Agreements were issued. These Agreements set out the approved activities, outputs, outcomes, financial profiles and reporting requirements. They also included conditions relating to monitoring, audit and compliance, in line with Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) guidance.

Context - Summary

In September 2025, Shropshire Council commissioned Paula Rogers Consulting to evaluate delivery of the Shropshire UKSPF and the Rural Fund up to 31 March 2025. Collectively referred to as ‘the Programme’, the two Funds represent a combined investment of £13.4 million aimed at building pride in place, increasing life chances and strengthening local economic resilience across Shropshire. The evaluation examines delivery across the three UKSPF Investment Priorities, these being Communities and Place, Supporting Local Business and People and Skills and assesses the complementary role of the Rural Fund in supporting rural communities and enterprises.

The evaluation has reviewed programme performance in terms of expenditure, outputs, outcomes and value for money. Evidence has been gathered through analysis of management data, documentation and stakeholder consultations, including discussions with key Council Officers and the SEP Board, alongside survey feedback from funded providers. Case studies have been used to illustrate the impact of local interventions and identify the factors contributing to effective delivery and outcomes.

Findings from the evaluation are intended to inform both national and local learning. They will contribute to the Government’s wider evaluation of the UKSPF while helping Shropshire Council and local partners to identify what has worked well, what challenges were encountered and how future regeneration and renewal programmes can build on this experience.

2. Relevance

2.1 Relevance – Introduction

This section assesses the relevance of the Shropshire UKSPF Programme in responding to local needs, challenges and opportunities. It examines the evidence base underpinning the Investment Plan and Rural Fund Addendum, the alignment of Programme priorities with Shropshire’s economic, social and environmental context and how strategic objectives were translated into delivery. The section also reflects on Programme design, the open call model and delivery experience, concluding with lessons to inform the delivery of future place-based funding programmes.

2.2 Context

2.2.1 The high-level Logic Model for the UKSPF, illustrates the step-by-step process of how the Fund’s central and local inputs will support UKSPF interventions to generate outputs, outcomes and impacts (Appendix 2).

The Shropshire Investment Plan and the Rural Fund Addendum identified challenges and opportunities that contributed to the high-level Logic Model at a local level. The challenges responded to evidence gathered through statistics, reports, strategies, data, intelligence and surveys and the opportunities built upon best practice, collaboration, gaps in provision and strategic vision.

Each of the challenges and opportunities, within the three Investment Priorities and the Rural Fund Addendum, are detailed below:

2.2.2 **Communities and Place Challenges:**

- (i) An ageing and imbalanced population structure, with a declining working-age population and limited cultural diversity, leading to pressures on health and social care services and challenges in retaining younger residents.
- (ii) Disparities between Shropshire’s 13 market towns and surrounding rural areas, where some communities face vacancy, dereliction and limited access to services, while others lack flexible spaces and cultural activity to support cohesion and local pride.
- (iii) Rising isolation, food poverty and rural exclusion in dispersed communities, compounded by limited transport connectivity and unequal access to cultural, social and recreational opportunities.
- (iv) Environmental vulnerabilities including recurrent flooding, climate change impacts and ageing infrastructure, increasing the need for investment in climate resilience, flood mitigation and sustainable urban design.
- (v) A need to strengthen community connection to place by empowering residents to shape and participate in the future of their towns and local environments, building capacity, inclusion and civic pride.

Communities and Place Opportunities:

- (i) Harness Shropshire’s distinctive natural, cultural and heritage assets to strengthen the county’s identity, promote pride in place and deliver sustainable regeneration across market towns and rural communities.

- (ii) Improve the functionality, accessibility and appeal of town centres and public spaces through placemaking, greening, active travel routes and adaptive reuse of vacant buildings for community and cultural use.
- (iii) Support volunteer-led and community-based initiatives that tackle isolation, deprivation and exclusion, enabling greater participation across generations and building self-sustaining networks of local support.
- (iv) Promote understanding of and action on climate change, biodiversity and air quality through local environmental projects and investment in sustainable infrastructure and flood resilience.
- (v) Build cultural capacity and strengthen social cohesion by supporting creative, heritage and community organisations to deliver locally led activities that connect people, culture and place.
- (vi) Link with business and skills priorities to create spaces, services and opportunities that encourage learning, volunteering and employment, fostering more resilient communities.

2.2.3 Supporting Local Business Challenges:

- (i) Operating within a period of significant economic, social and environmental change, with businesses recovering from the pandemic, Brexit and localised flooding while seeking to achieve net zero in a low productivity economy.
- (ii) Difficulties in attracting and retaining skilled workers, particularly younger people, due to limited affordable housing, transport challenges and gaps in entry-level skills.
- (iii) Need for accessible, high-quality business support for a large self-employed population and for micro and small enterprises with limited awareness of available provision.
- (iv) Shortage of affordable, flexible and fit-for-purpose commercial space, compounded by heritage and flood risk constraints, limiting opportunities for business start-up, relocation and expansion.
- (v) Dependence on traditional and lower-paid sectors such as tourism, hospitality and food and drink, with limited diversification into higher-value sectors.

Supporting Local Business Opportunities:

- (i) Build on previous business recovery and resilience programmes to provide tailored, high-quality support enabling businesses to innovate, grow and boost productivity.
- (ii) Support the diversification and growth of high-value sectors including the visitor economy, creative industries, low carbon and renewable energy, food and drink, agri-tech and green industries.
- (iii) Encourage investment in research and development and attract new businesses to locate in Shropshire, particularly those aligned with sustainability and innovation goals.
- (iv) Invest in infrastructure and flexible workspace provision in market towns, high streets and growth corridors to accommodate expanding businesses and remote workers.

- (v) Strengthen collaboration with the Marches LEP, business improvement districts and partners to coordinate funding, maximise recovery support and promote business networks.
- (vi) Align business support with workforce development and place-based priorities these being supporting skills, connectivity and housing to retain and attract a working-age population.

2.2.4 **People and Skills Challenges:**

- (i) Shropshire faces a constrained labour market, with low unemployment, an ageing population and the loss of younger skilled workers. Covid-19 has worsened inactivity rates, particularly among older residents.
- (ii) A significant proportion of adults have low numeracy, literacy and digital skills, limiting access to training, progression and higher-value jobs. Improving basic skills is essential to raise productivity and support inclusive growth.
- (iii) Employers in key sectors, particularly health and social care and hospitality, face acute recruitment challenges. Innovative, employer-led approaches are needed to build a sustainable local workforce.
- (iv) Shropshire's economy remains dominated by low-wage, low-skill jobs, constraining productivity and driving out-migration of young people. Boosting higher-level skills is key to supporting business growth and raising earnings.
- (v) Skills needs vary across the county, with concentrations of low attainment in rural and market-town areas. Targeting support for adults with low or no qualifications and tackling rural isolation, remains a priority.

People and Skills Opportunities:

- (i) Shropshire's skills base is improving, with fewer residents holding low or no qualifications. There is an opportunity to sustain this progress by upskilling adults, improving basic numeracy, literacy and digital skills and supporting older residents to stay connected and active, particularly in rural areas.
- (ii) Shropshire's established agricultural base, natural assets and focus on renewable energy create opportunities to grow the green economy. Developing skills in sustainability, agri-tech, low-carbon construction and environmental management will support new business growth, higher-value employment and alignment with other investment priorities.
- (iii) With good broadband coverage and ongoing rollout through Project Gigabit, there is potential to expand access to digital and blended learning. Tackling digital exclusion among older residents and disadvantaged households will be key, alongside developing digital skills for higher-value jobs and improved productivity.

2.2.5 **The Rural Fund Challenges:**

- (i) Digital connectivity.
- (ii) Rising energy costs.
- (iii) Low productivity.

The Rural Fund Opportunities:

- (i) Expansion of the visitor economy by supporting tourism attractions or accommodation.
- (ii) Diversification of land-based businesses by moving into other sectors, such as tourism, food processing, retail, etc.
- (iii) Growing Shropshire’s key sectors – grants supporting the development of key sectors including land-based, food processing, environmental technologies and manufacturing.

2.3 Programme Design and Project Implementation

2.3.1 Lead local authorities set out their approach in an Investment Plan. Investment Plans were submitted to government in August 2022 with the Rural Plan Addendum following in November 2022. Due to unforeseen delays by government, contracting did not take place until later in the year. The Shropshire UKSPF Programme was formally contracted in December 2022 with the Rural Plan incorporated 1 April 2023.

2.3.2 Once approval was received, the Programme began its development and implementation phases with delivery commencing in February 2023. All Projects were scheduled to be completed by 31 March 2025. A list of all projects supported, together with delivery organisations and the value of UKSPF funding allocated at point of approval, is provided in Appendix 1.

2.4 Reflections of Project Implementation

2.4.1 The Calls for projects in January, April, May, September and November 2023 were designed to translate the strategic Opportunities and Challenges within Shropshire’s UKSPF Investment Plan and Rural Addendum into practical, intermediary-led projects. Each Call addressed relevant aspects of communities, business, skills and rural priorities, ensuring alignment with Shropshire’s broader economic, social and environmental objectives.

All Calls were funded through the Main UKSPF Programme and, in addition, the September 2023 Call included projects that could be funded through the Main UKSPF Programme and the Rural Fund and included revenue and capital funding.

The Call windows and eligible activity are summarised in Table 7 and detailed in Appendix 4.

Table 7: Shropshire’s Call Windows and Eligible Activity

Call Window	Intervention Priority	Eligible Activity
January 2023 (Revenue)	Communities and Place Supporting Local Business	Feasibility
April 2023 (Revenue)	Communities and Place	Enhancing community connections, cultural engagement, environmental awareness and infrastructure to support employment, education and volunteering
	Supporting Local Business	Supporting business growth and innovation through R&D, workforce development and infrastructure investment, fostering collaboration and aligning with wider community, skills and place priorities to drive sustainable economic growth in Shropshire.
May 2023 (Revenue)	Supporting People and Skills	Providing targeted employment and skills support, promoting digital inclusion and building a skilled, inclusive workforce to drive sustainable economic growth
September 2023 (Revenue and Capital)	Communities and Place	Strengthening community assets, culture, environmental awareness and infrastructure to foster connections, wellbeing and opportunities for learning, work and volunteering.
	Supporting Local Business	Supporting business growth and workforce development, investing in infrastructure and co-working hubs, fostering collaboration through networks and funding and linking with Community and Place and People and Skills priorities.
December 2023 (Revenue)	Supporting People and Skills	Delivering tailored support and local skills initiatives to help people access education and training, meet net zero and environmental goals and build a skilled, adaptable workforce that drives sustainable economic growth.

- 2.4.2 The phased UKSPF Calls for Communities and Place, Supporting Local Business and People and Skills have delivered significant benefits for Shropshire. By targeting local priorities through intermediary organisations, the Programme has successfully supported a wide range of projects that improve community infrastructure, promote cultural engagement, improve employability, skills provision and digital inclusion and stimulate business growth. The approach has enabled tailored ‘one-to-many’ support, allowing projects to reach multiple beneficiaries, build local capacity and respond to the specific needs of communities, businesses and individuals.
- 2.4.3 The Calls have provided a valuable framework for investment in key sectors, reinforced social cohesion and encouraged engagement in sustainable and innovative initiatives across Shropshire.
- 2.4.4 The open call approach adopted by Shropshire Council was widely regarded as a fair and transparent way of allocating Main UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund resources. By requiring all applicants, including the Council itself, to compete for funding through a clear and auditable process, the model ensured that projects were selected on merit and that the Challenges and

Opportunities identified in the Investment Plan were effectively addressed. The model also enabled organisations to draw on their expertise and develop creative approaches to achieving the required outputs and outcomes, rather than following a prescriptive framework. As the External Funding and Technical Officer recalled:

‘The delivery structure was an open call process. What we set out to do in the Investment Plan was largely achieved, with projects spread geographically across the county. The approach was recognised both internally and externally as a great success being structured, fair and auditable, with clear calls, weighted scoring and transparent decision-making through the SEP Board’.

- 2.4.5 Across all three Investment Priorities, the experience from delivery highlighted the importance of early planning, clear sequencing of Calls and well established internal coordination to support timely and integrated delivery. Technical Officers consistently noted that clearer guidance for applicants, streamlined internal approval processes and early engagement with delivery partners were important to enable reduced administrative burden and to allow projects to focus more effectively on implementation and impact.

Delays in funding confirmation from Central Government resulted in compressed delivery timescales and limited opportunities for cross-priority integration, particularly between business support and skills and employment provision. Technical Officers emphasised that launching Calls concurrently, or in a more coordinated way, would have enabled better alignment, clearer progression pathways and a more coherent programme-wide offer.

2.5 Communities and Place - Reflections of Project Implementation

- 2.5.1 The Communities and Place Priority was designed to support local organisations and initiatives that strengthen community cohesion, improve local infrastructure and enhance public spaces across Shropshire. Through the UKSPF open call process a wide range of organisations and projects were funded ensuring a good coverage of Shropshire. Projects included community hubs, town centre improvements, local heritage initiatives and volunteer-led programmes.
- 2.5.2 The open call approach ensured fairness and transparency, providing equal opportunity for all eligible organisations, including smaller community groups, to apply. It also allowed the Council to address the specific challenges and opportunities identified in the Investment Plan, ensuring that the funded projects aligned with both strategic priorities and local needs. All projects had to address clear need and demand as part of the application process, helping to avoid duplication of activity. The External Funding and Technical Lead Officer highlighted that without UKSPF *‘the Council could not have supported activities such as The Hive or Hands Together Ludlow, which make a visible difference to community life’.*
- 2.5.3 Project design under this Priority reflected a mix of organisational types, from grassroots community groups to larger delivery partners, which helped to bring a diversity of experience and capacity to the Programme. While the open call process encouraged alignment with the Council’s strategic objectives, the Technical Officer, leading this Priority, often had to work under tight timescales, requiring rapid mobilisation and coordination with internal teams such as Finance and Legal Officers. As the Technical Officer for the Programme noted *‘On my first day I wrote a Call,’* highlighting the fast-paced nature of Programme set-up and delivery. This combination of structured governance and flexible delivery enabled a wide geographic spread of projects and ensured that both urban and rural communities could access support, though, in some cases, the speed of delivery limited opportunities for more integrated, cross-project design. The External Funding and Technical Lead Officer commented *‘The spread of projects geographically has been good, not every community could be covered, but grant schemes ensured opportunities were available county-wide’.*

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- 2.5.4 Implementation was largely effective, supported by the expertise and close teamwork. *'It was very busy and stressful...towards the end of the Programme, in the last quarter, I had to do a lot of changes to grant funding agreements, to get funding spent'* illustrating the pressure to mobilise funding quickly and ensure compliance.
- 2.5.5 Governance and appraisal systems were considered robust, with weighted scoring sheets providing transparency and auditable records. The Technical Officer explained, *'We aligned all the information that was asked in the calls. It was a very fair and transparent process. No applicants challenged any decisions that were made'*.
- 2.5.6 The geographic and thematic reach of the projects was extensive, with funding benefiting both urban and rural communities. However, the pace of delivery, particularly for capital projects, constrained the time available for mobilisation and compliant delivery. Projects were required to complete multiple stages, including funding confirmation, procurement and regulatory checks, within compressed timescales. As the Technical Officer noted *'Time constraints and lateness of the funding did not always give the projects much time to deliver after doing the Call, waiting for confirmation of funding, undertaking procurement and making sure all regulations were in place'*.
- 2.5.7 The Communities and Place Priority added significant value at both local and individual levels. Several projects delivered outcomes far exceeding the level of funding invested. Examples were highlighted including a Community Café in Ludlow, which provided invaluable support for both young and elderly residents and infrastructure projects such as the Cambrian Railway Station renovation, which would not have been possible without UKSPF investment. Many initiatives delivered outcomes beyond the original scope of the projects, including improvements to health, accessibility and social inclusion, which were often difficult to measure. The Technical Officer highlighted examples where this was evident including the Canal and River Trust projects (Montgomery Canal, Ellesmere Yard and Making Ripples) and enhancements to county park paths through the Council's Access to the Countryside projects. As the Technical Officer noted, *'It is easy to collect outputs but outcomes are more difficult to prove and understand'*.
- 2.5.8 Experience highlighted the value of clear, accessible guidance for applicants, particularly smaller voluntary and community organisations with limited capacity. The Technical officer observed that simplified application materials and clearer expectations around evidence, procurement and delivery requirements helped community groups engage confidently with the Programme and reduced delays during mobilisation. Supporting applicants through the process was particularly important given the pace of delivery and the varied capability across the community sector.
- 2.5.9 In summary, the Communities and Place Priority has delivered a rich and varied portfolio of projects that have strengthened Shropshire's social fabric and enhanced its community infrastructure. The open call model ensured transparency and inclusivity, allowing both established organisations and grassroots groups to access funding and deliver meaningful local change. Projects achieved far-reaching outcomes that extended beyond their original scope, demonstrating how modest investments can generate significant community benefit. As the External Funding and Technical Lead Officer reflected, *'A five-year model would have created more sustainable outcomes and allowed time for reflection and consolidation,'* reinforcing the importance of continuity, learning and sustained investment to build on the solid foundations established through this Programme.

2.6 Supporting Local Business - Reflections of Project Implementation

- 2.6.1 The Supporting Local Business Priority was designed to reinforce the resilience, productivity and growth potential of Shropshire’s small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Through the UKSPF open call process, the Council sought to enable projects that could enhance business competitiveness, stimulate innovation and improve access to support and infrastructure. Funded interventions included business grants, innovation support, sector-specific programmes and activities to stimulate local supply chains and entrepreneurship.
- 2.6.2 The open call approach created a transparent and competitive process that allowed a wide range of delivery partners, including local business networks, enterprise agencies and universities to apply. This ensured alignment with the local economic priorities set out in the Investment Plan while maintaining fairness and accountability. The process enabled the Council to identify projects that reflected both strategic priorities and the distinct needs of Shropshire’s business base, which is largely rural, micro in scale and dispersed across a wide geography. The External Funding and Technical Lead Officer observed that without UKSPF *‘Shropshire Council would not have been able to maintain key economic functions such as Visit Shropshire, the Tourism Office or support for the Shrewsbury BID’*.
- 2.6.3 Project design under this Investment Priority reflected a diverse mix of delivery models, ranging from grant schemes for micro-businesses to specialist innovation and start-up programmes. This diversity allowed the Investment Priority to reach businesses across multiple sectors, while encouraging collaboration between delivery partners. The Supporting Local Business Technical Officer observed that the breadth of activity demonstrated the Council’s commitment to ensuring business support reached all parts of Shropshire: *‘We had everything from small independent traders to high-tech firms involved’*. However, the rapid implementation timetable, combined with the late approval of funding, meant that several projects had to be mobilised at pace, limiting opportunities for early integration or cross-project collaboration.
- 2.6.4 It was felt that the design also introduced complexity. The use of eight separate interventions, each with distinct reporting and monitoring requirements, was viewed as administratively burdensome and, at times, artificial. The Technical Officer questioned whether so many open Calls were necessary, suggesting that future programmes might retain greater flexibility and efficiency by commissioning some activity directly through trusted local partners. It was felt this would reduce transaction costs and allow more agile management of funding between priorities.
- 2.6.5 Implementation was generally effective, supported by robust governance and consistent appraisal processes. The Programme benefited from the Team’s extensive ERDF and ESF experience, which enabled effective local systems to be developed quickly in the absence of national guidance. Weighted scoring systems were used to assess applications, ensuring transparency and providing a robust audit trail. Internal collaboration between Economic Growth, Finance and Legal teams enabled swift contracting once approvals were confirmed, though delays in internal sign-off processes occasionally created delivery bottlenecks. As the Technical Officer reflected, *‘The open calls worked well, but the turnaround time was very tight. We were often developing, appraising and contracting almost simultaneously’*.
- 2.6.6 The geographic and thematic spread of projects was comprehensive, ensuring both urban centres and rural areas benefitted. However, several Technical Officers noted that greater coordination between Calls, particularly between Supporting Local Business and People and Skills, could have strengthened outcomes. For example, joint calls or staggered announcements could have supported a more coherent approach to workforce development and business growth. As one Technical Officer reflected, *‘If People and Skills had gone out at*

the same time, we could have linked up training with the business support, there were missed opportunities to join things up’.

2.6.7 The Programme delivered tangible benefits to the local economy, enabling SMEs to invest, adapt and grow. Many projects exceeded their original outputs, demonstrating significant additionality in areas such as digital adoption, innovation and carbon reduction. Examples included sector-specific support for the visitor economy, initiatives to improve business productivity and capital investments that unlocked new workspace provision. The Technical Officer noted that the flexibility of the open call approach enabled *‘projects that could really make a difference quickly’* while acknowledging that evidencing long-term business outcomes, such as job creation and increased turnover, was more challenging within the short delivery period.

2.6.8 Learning focused on the need for clearer pipeline development and earlier engagement with delivery partners and the business community. The Technical Officer identified that improved clarity on match funding requirements and earlier signalling of forthcoming Calls would have supported better developed projects and reduced uncertainty for applicants. There was also a view that presenting a more coherent, joined-up offer to businesses would have helped them better understand how different interventions related to one another. The Technical Officer commented, *‘We need to get all the Calls ready before we launch so they connect and businesses can see the full picture’.*

2.6.9 In summary, the Supporting Local Business Priority delivered a broad and impactful range of interventions that have enhanced Shropshire’s business ecosystem. The open call approach worked effectively in ensuring transparency and accessibility, while the diversity of funded activity reflected the County’s varied economic landscape. Future funding rounds could build on this experience by promoting earlier integration with complementary priorities, enabling longer delivery windows for capital and business support projects and embedding clearer mechanisms for measuring long-term economic impact. As the External Funding and Technical Lead Officer reflected, *‘It’s such a shame we spent so much time setting up the processes for it all to be over in three years,’* highlighting the importance of continuity and sustained investment to maximise the value of the systems and partnerships established through the Programme.

2.7 People and Skills - Reflections of Project Implementation

2.7.1 The People and Skills Priority complemented the other two Investment Priorities by addressing the underlying skills, employability and inclusion challenges that affect both business growth and community resilience. Through the UKSPF open call process, delivered via the Council’s Delta eSourcing procurement portal, the Council sought to fund initiatives that supported individuals furthest from the labour market, enhanced employability and employment sustainability, improved access to basic skills and helped residents develop the capabilities needed to participate fully in Shropshire’s economy. The Delta portal provided a transparent and structured mechanism for advertising and managing applications, while the Call itself represented the formal invitation for project proposals. Funded interventions included employability and confidence-building programmes, targeted digital inclusion activities and projects supporting progression into volunteering or work.

2.7.2 The open call approach ensured transparency and encouraged a range of delivery partners to apply, including local voluntary sector organisations, FE and HE, training providers and employment support providers. This diversity reflected the varied needs of residents across Shropshire’s rural and urban areas and allowed projects to tailor their support to different cohorts, including young people, the long-term unemployed and those experiencing health-related barriers to work. The Technical Officer commented that, *‘many of these projects filled*

gaps that national programmes simply didn't reach, particularly for residents who had fallen out of the mainstream system'.

- 2.7.3 Project design under this Priority reflected a clear focus on personalised, holistic support. Delivery partners adopted flexible approaches that addressed both practical and emotional barriers to participation, recognising that confidence, wellbeing and digital skills were often as important as formal qualifications. Collaboration with community-based organisations was a particular strength, as they were trusted by local residents and able to reach individuals who would not normally engage with statutory provision. The Technical Officer noted, *'Smaller organisations were able to adapt quickly, offering support that really met people where they were, something larger schemes often struggle to do'*. However, the timing of the open calls and delays to funding approval created challenges for early mobilisation and integration with other Priorities. The External Funding and Technical Lead Officer noted *'The People and Skills call came out quite late and, by then some of the opportunities to link with the business support work had been missed'*.
- 2.7.4 The later launch of the People and Skills investment Priority, compared with other Calls, had a distinct impact on delivery. Compressed timescales limited opportunities for projects to build momentum, sustain participant engagement and establish referral pathways with employers and community-based initiatives. Technical Officers noted that earlier alignment with business and community activity would have improved participant progression into volunteering, training and employment, particularly for those furthest from the labour market.
- 2.7.5 The geographic and thematic spread of projects was comprehensive, covering both market towns and rural communities. Participants benefitted from a range of interventions that built confidence, improved wellbeing and supported re-engagement with learning and work. Quantitative outputs were achieved, but the most meaningful changes were often qualitative and more difficult to evidence within the short timeframe. As the Technical Officer explained, *'It's easy to capture numbers, but the real impact was often in softer outcomes such as someone feeling ready to volunteer again or gaining the confidence to apply for a course'*. The External Funding and Technical Lead Officer also said, *'Some of the outcomes were fantastic, people who hadn't worked for years got into jobs or training. The projects were small in scale but made a real difference locally'*.
- 2.7.6 Delivery capacity varied across the provider network. Many organisations had previous ESF experience and were well-placed to deliver, though several smaller providers faced challenges rebuilding delivery teams following funding gaps between ESF and UKSPF. The Council's supportive approach and flexibility in grant management helped mitigate these issues. The Technical Officer noted, *'The experience was there, but some providers struggled to scale up at pace after the break between programmes, it took time to re-establish referral routes and partnerships'*.
- 2.7.7 The People and Skills Investment Priority generated valuable learning around innovation and partnership working. Several projects trialled new approaches such as work tasters with local employers, wellbeing and creative activity linked to employability and digital inclusion support for older residents. These models extended beyond traditional employment support and contributed to wider community resilience. However, all Technical Officers identified the need for improved mechanisms to capture soft outcomes and for longer delivery periods to enable lasting impact and partnership development.
- 2.7.8 In summary, the People and Skills Priority delivered targeted, person-centred support that addressed local skills and inclusion challenges, complementing the economic and community objectives of the wider Programme. Projects achieved demonstrable benefits for participants, particularly those furthest from employment, while also enhancing the local provider network.

Future funding rounds could build on this experience by launching Calls for all Priorities concurrently, simplifying monitoring requirements to capture qualitative outcomes more effectively and providing longer delivery windows to maximise impact and sustainability. The External Funding and Technical Lead Officer commented *'Next time, we need to plan the sequencing of Calls better. If People and Skills had gone out earlier, we could have created stronger links between employability and business growth'*.

2.8 Relevance - Lesson Learned

2.8.1 Overall, the Programme was highly relevant to Shropshire's local needs, responding clearly to the challenges and opportunities identified in the Investment Plan and Rural Addendum and aligning well with national UKSPF priorities. The Programme design translated strategic objectives into locally tailored interventions across Communities and Place, Supporting Local Business and People and Skills Investment Priorities, supported by a transparent open call approach. Despite the late start and compressed delivery period, projects were broadly well-aligned with local strategies and demonstrated clear coherence with the Programme's intended objectives and outcomes. Set out below are the key findings and reflections on the Programme's relevance:

- (i) Well-established relationships with delivery organisations, dating back to the European Structural and Investment Funds, helped engage partners already familiar with the needs of local communities and businesses. These trusted organisations were crucial for local delivery, enabling projects to mobilise quickly. Their involvement encouraged locally led and inclusive activities and demonstrated a willingness to collaborate with Shropshire Council and other partners to deliver what was right locally.
- (ii) The open call model proved effective in ensuring fairness, transparency and a wide geographic spread of projects. It enabled a varied mix of delivery organisations and addressed the opportunities and challenges identified in the Investment Plan. However, the staggered sequencing of Calls and limited delivery timescales constrained opportunities for coordination between projects and delivery partners. Opportunities to share information, refer participants or align delivery across organisations were sometimes missed due to time pressures rather than lack of willingness. This was particularly evident where People and Skills activity launched later, limiting the ability to connect employability support with community and business interventions.
- (iii) The Programme's structure around individual Investment Priorities meant that some cross-cutting challenges were missed. Issues such as workforce development, rural isolation, digital exclusion, health and wellbeing, inclusion and the transition to net zero cut across all three Priorities were largely addressed through separate projects. Future programmes could benefit from cross-priority Calls or thematic frameworks designed to embed strategic coherence, sustainability and long-term impact.
- (iv) Late confirmation of funding and compressed delivery windows placed pressure on both internal teams and delivery organisations. Experience highlighted the importance of early programme planning, clearer internal approval processes and timely regulatory and financial sign-off to support effective delivery. Simplified guidance and consistent communication between Technical Officers, Finance and Legal teams helped mitigate some of these challenges, but longer delivery periods would allow greater scope for partnership development, learning and consolidation of outcomes.

Relevance: Summary

The Programme was developed from a robust evidence base, reflecting Shropshire’s distinctive economic, demographic and geographic profile. It addressed issues such as an ageing and dispersed population, low productivity, workforce shortages, limited connectivity and rural isolation, while capitalising on opportunities to strengthen community assets, support business diversification and grow the green and visitor economies.

The External Funding and Technical Lead Officer said that this approach ‘was recognised both internally and externally as a great success, being structured, fair and auditable’.

While delivery was largely effective and achieved wide thematic and geographic reach, Technical Officers noted that the late approval of funding and phased sequencing of Calls constrained opportunities for integration across Priorities. Nevertheless, the Programme delivered significant local outcomes, built organisational capacity and generated valuable learning for future funding rounds.

Key lessons include the need for earlier planning, longer delivery windows and more coordinated, cross-priority Calls to maximise alignment, sustainability and long-term impact across Shropshire’s communities, businesses and residents.

3. Performance

3.1 Performance - Introduction

This section evaluates the Programme’s performance of expenditure, outputs and outcomes in relation to the targets established in the UKSPF Memorandum of Understanding. It examines the impact of the Programme and its Projects by analysing achieved spend, outputs and outcomes and concludes with lessons learned.

3.2 Spend Performance – Programme Level

3.2.1 The overall Programme allocation totalled £10,845,217 for the Main UKSPF Programme and £2,589,503 for the Rural Fund. Within the Main UKSPF Programme, this comprised £433,809 for Management and Administration, £3,316,929.96 for Communities and Place, £5,476,631.79 for Supporting Local Business and £1,617,846.57 for People and Skills. The Rural Fund included £1,732,677 for Supporting Rural Communities and £856,826 for Supporting Rural Business.

During the final stages of the Programme, funding was reprofiled between projects and Investment Priorities to respond to delivery challenges and opportunities as they emerged. As a result, final allocations agreed for each project by Investment Priority differs from the original target allocations, while overall Programme objectives were maintained. A list of all projects supported, together with delivery organisations and the value of UKSPF funding allocated at point of approval, is provided in Appendix 1.

Tables 8 and 9 provide a detailed breakdown of Programme expenditure, showing both target spend and actual performance.

Table 8: Main UKSPF Programme Spend Performance

Investment Priority	Target Spend 31 March 2025		Actual Performance 31 March 2025	
	CAP	REV	CAP	REV
Management and Administration	£0	£433,808.68	£0	£433,808.68
Communities and Place	£1,769,371.71	£1,547,558.25	£1,560,268.37	£1,547,558.75
	£3,316,929.96		£3,107,827.12	
Supporting Local Business	£430,628.29	£5,046,003.50	£430,628.02	£4,487,420.97
	£5,476,631.79		£4,918,048.99	
People and Skills	£0	£1,617,846.57	£0	£1,586,364.16
	£1,617,846.57		£1,586,364.16	
Total Allocation	£2,200,000	£8,645,217	£1,990,896.39	£8,055,152.56
	£10,845,217		£10,046,048.95	

Table 9: Rural Programme Spend Performance

Investment Priority	Target Spend 31 March 2025	Actual Performance 31 March 2025
Supporting Rural Communities	£1,732,677	£1,576,607.69
Supporting Rural Business	£856,826	£519,066.64
Total Allocation	£2,589,503	£2,095,674.33

3.2.2 The Programme’s total target expenditure by 31 March 2025 was £10,845,217 for the Main UKSPF Programme and £2,589,503 for the Rural Fund, giving a combined total of £13,434,720. Despite a delayed start, the Programme achieved £10,046,048.95 (92.6%) of its Main UKSPF Programme allocation and £2,095,674.33 (80.9%) of its Rural Fund allocation. This equates to a total spend of £12,141,723.28, representing 90.4% of the overall target.

Total spend represents a significant achievement given the constrained timescales and the extensive development work required to mobilise delivery. This is particularly commendable given the complexity of managing funding across both the Main UKSPF Programme and the Rural Fund, multiple interventions, a mix of capital and revenue budgets and the associated Management and Administration activities.

Overall, the Programme demonstrated resilient financial management and delivery capacity, ensuring that the majority of funding was effectively deployed within a condensed timeframe. This performance highlights the Council’s careful oversight of public funds and provides a solid foundation for any future investment opportunities.

3.2.3 Appendix 5 sets out expenditure achieved under each Investment Priority within the Main UKSPF Programme, broken down by Intervention, alongside expenditure across the Rural Fund Investment Priorities, showing actual performance as at 31 March 2025.

3.3 Output and Outcome Performance - Overview

3.3.1 Tables showing actual performance against output and outcome targets for each of the three Investment Priorities are provided in Appendix 6. An analysis of performance for each Investment Priority is presented below.

The Rural Fund, which supported capital projects, did not have specific outputs or outcomes contractually agreed with MHCLG. However, projects within the Communities and Place and Supporting Local Business Investment Priorities that received capital funding through the Rural Fund were required to deliver defined outputs and outcomes. These are presented separately in Appendix 6 and are analysed separately within the summaries below.

3.4 Communities and Place - Output and Outcome Performance

3.4.1 Main UKSPF Programme (Capital and Revenue Funding)

The Communities and Place Investment Priority in Shropshire has delivered a wide range of community-focused activity, with particularly impressive achievements in cultural engagement, event delivery and support for local organisations. Across several interventions, activity levels have gone well beyond original expectations, showing both high community demand and effective programme delivery. An analysis of the outputs and outcomes achieved under the different interventions is provided below:

- (i) Under E4 (Enhancing Cultural, Historic & Heritage Institutions) the scale of green and blue space improvements has been significant, with over 940,000m² improved against

a target of 500m². This represents a major uplift in local environmental assets. Community involvement has been positive, with 25 volunteering opportunities created and 29 events supported, helping increase participation and local use of facilities.

- (ii) The results under E6 (Local Arts, Cultural & Creative Activities) are particularly notable. Event delivery has been extremely high, with 688 local events and activities supported (compared with a target of 15) 386 volunteering opportunities and more than 13,000 engagement instances recorded. These achievements highlight a vibrant cultural scene and demonstrate the Programme's contribution to enabling accessible, community-led activity.
- (iii) E11 (Capacity Building for Local Groups) also presents an encouraging picture. 386 groups received non-grant support, almost ten times the target, reflecting wide reach across local organisations. Engagement outcomes were also substantial, with 4,458 people involved in programme-supported activity.
- (iv) While E1 (Town Centre and High Street Improvements) has delivered fewer physical outputs to date, notable progress has been made in several areas, including delivery of three out of four planned low-carbon infrastructure projects and half of the targeted public realm improvements. Changes to the way footfall and vacancy data were recorded make direct comparison difficult, but the programme has still generated tangible activity.
- (v) Finally, E14 (Feasibility Studies) performed well above target, with nine studies completed and four already progressing into new projects, helping to build future investment opportunities.

3.4.2 Rural Fund (Capital Projects)

- (i) Under E3 (Green Spaces and Natural Environment) capital investment through the Rural Fund delivered substantial physical improvements, with almost 9,900m² of green and blue space created or enhanced against a target of 6,020m². While fewer facilities were supported than originally anticipated, the scale of environmental enhancement achieved represents a meaningful long-term asset for local communities.
- (ii) Investment under E7 (Active Travel Enhancements) delivered a high number of new or improved routes, exceeding the target for cycleways and footpaths (23 delivered against a target of 18). Although the total length of routes improved fell short of the original target, the outputs achieved indicate tangible improvements to local infrastructure. Outcomes relating to usage and footfall had not yet been recorded by March 2025, reflecting the time lag typically associated with infrastructure projects.

3.4.3 Overall Conclusions: Communities and Place

The Communities and Place Investment Priority has delivered a wide-ranging and impactful programme across both the Main UKSPF Programme and the Rural Fund.

The Main UKSPF Programme was particularly effective in driving community engagement, cultural participation and organisational capacity, with many outputs and engagement-related outcomes exceeding original expectations despite a compressed delivery period. The Rural Fund complemented this activity by supporting capital projects that created lasting community and environmental assets, notably through green space enhancements and active travel infrastructure.

While some outcome measures, such as increased footfall and usage, had not yet been achieved or recorded by March 2025, this reflects the longer timescales typically associated with capital investments. Overall, the Programme has established a robust foundation for continued benefits to be realised beyond the formal funding period.

3.5 Supporting Local Business - Output and Outcome Performance

3.5.1 Main UKSPF Programme (Revenue Funding)

The Supporting Local Business Investment Priority has delivered a wide range of activity across Shropshire, with several interventions achieving well above target, particularly in enterprise engagement and business advisory support. In addition 192 full-time jobs have been created across the Investment Priority, achieving 97% of the total target. This is an excellent achievement considering the short timescales in which the projects had to deliver. Although grant delivery has been lower than anticipated in some areas, the Programme has generated valuable business participation, capability-building and early innovation outcomes.

An analysis of the outputs and outcomes achieved under the different interventions is provided below:

- (i) Under E17 (Visitor Economy Development) enterprise engagement has been particularly encouraging, with 147 businesses receiving non-financial support against a target of 50. Event activity has also exceeded expectations, with 35 local events supported compared with a target of 15, helping to stimulate local visitor-facing activity and visibility.
- (ii) The work under E20 (R&D and Innovation Support) has been a significant area of delivery. 248 businesses received non-financial support (target 100) and adoption of new-to-firm technologies exceeded expectations (93 against 75). Although fewer new-to-market products have been recorded so far, the Programme has already contributed to 72 jobs created, highlighting early economic benefits from innovation-focused activity.
- (iii) E23 (Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Support) has seen high levels of engagement. 286 enterprises received non-financial support (target 120) and 47 grants were awarded. 40 potential entrepreneurs were supported towards enterprise readiness and early outcomes include the creation of seven new enterprises and 17 jobs, indicating emerging growth within the local entrepreneurial landscape.
- (iv) Delivery under E29 (Decarbonisation Support) shows notable levels of business engagement, with 159 businesses supported (target 80). Although physical infrastructure outputs are yet to progress, the programme reports an estimated 6,631 tonnes of CO₂ reductions, reflecting meaningful activity in carbon-saving practices.
- (v) The performance of E30 (Business Support for Employment Growth) has been particularly productive. Over 550 enterprises received support and 108 grants were issued, resulting in over 82 jobs created, surpassing the target of 60.
- (vi) Finally, E31 (Feasibility Studies) performed above expectations, with nine studies completed and early progression of two projects, helping build a forward pipeline of business development opportunities.

3.5.2 Rural Fund (Capital Projects)

- (i) The Rural Fund provided targeted capital investment to micro and small enterprises in rural areas, with 63 businesses receiving grants against a target of 66. This demonstrates high take-up of capital support and effective delivery within the available timescales.

- (ii) Early outcomes are encouraging, with 21 full-time equivalent jobs created (against a target of 29) and 54 enterprises adopting new-to-the-firm technologies or processes, significantly exceeding the original target of 33. This suggests that capital investment has supported productivity improvements and business modernisation, even where employment impacts are still emerging.

3.5.3 Overall Conclusions: Supporting Local Business

The Supporting Local Business Investment Priority has delivered extensive business engagement, advisory support and early economic impacts across both the Main UKSPF Programme and the Rural Fund.

The Main UKSPF Programme performed particularly well in enterprise reach, innovation support and employment growth, with several interventions exceeding targets for business participation, technology adoption and job creation. The Rural Fund complemented this by providing capital investment to rural businesses, supporting productivity improvements and early employment outcomes. The level of engagement and early productivity gains suggest that further economic impacts are likely to accrue after March 2025.

3.6 People and Skills - Output and Outcome Performance

3.6.1 Main UKSPF Programme (Revenue Funding)

The People and Skills Investment Priority has delivered substantial engagement across Shropshire, with several interventions exceeding their intended reach and contributing to higher levels of participation in training, upskilling and employment-related support. An analysis of the outputs and outcomes achieved under the different interventions is provided below:

- (i) Under E33 (Employment Support for Economically Inactive People) the Programme has engaged 691 socially excluded individuals, close to the target of 750, showing wide take-up of support. The number of people helped to find employment has gone beyond expectations, with 575 individuals supported into job search or employment pathways, compared with a target of 360. Although basic skills delivery and sustained employment figures remain below target, the Programme has enabled 486 people to report improved employability, reflecting meaningful progress for many participants. Employment outcomes (86 into work and 24 sustaining work) indicate early movement toward longer-term goals, although significantly below target (360 into work and 90 sustaining work).
- (ii) Delivery under E36 (Digital Inclusion and Essential Digital Skills) has been very positive. Uptake has surpassed targets in all areas, with 372 people supported to access basic digital skills and 350 supported with life skills, both above forecast levels. Outcomes have been particularly encouraging, with 354 participants gaining a qualification or completing a course, exceeding the target of 250.
- (iii) The results from E37 (Support for the Employed to Access Courses) highlight a high level of engagement from the workforce. 280 people participated in education (target 200) and 147 retrained (target 125). This has led to 278 individuals gaining qualifications or skills, well above the target of 160, showing positive progression for those looking to advance within the labour market.
- (iv) Under E38 (Local Skills Needs) delivery has remained on track, with 412 people supported to gain vocational licences and 409 economically active individuals participating in mainstream skills training, both slightly above target. These results contribute to local workforce readiness and sector-specific capability.

3.6.2 Overall Conclusions: People and Skills

The People and Skills Investment Priority has achieved high levels of engagement across Shropshire, with several interventions exceeding participation and qualification targets.

Delivery has been particularly effective in digital inclusion, workforce upskilling and progression into employment pathways. While sustained employment and some skills outcomes remain below target, this reflects the time required for individuals to convert support into long-term labour market outcomes.

Early evidence of improved employability, high course completion rates and progression into work-related activity indicates that the Programme has supported meaningful individual progress and laid solid foundations for future employment and skills outcomes beyond the reporting period.

However, the short delivery period and limited funding constrained the overall impact of the supported employment projects, which typically require 12–18 months of intensive engagement to achieve sustained employment outcomes. This highlights the importance of monitoring beyond Programme end dates to capture longer-term results. There was also evidence that available funding limited the extent to which support could meet local demand. In particular, digital and vocational upskilling provision could only partially address need, as illustrated by waiting lists of over 250 learners for the School of Coding programme, discussed further in Section 5.6.5 (vi).

3.7 Performance - Lessons Learned

3.7.1 Overall, the Programme achieved a high level of expenditure and delivery against outputs within a compressed timeframe, demonstrating effective performance management despite the scale and complexity of the funding arrangements. Set out below are the key lessons learned:

- (i) Compressed delivery periods can still achieve high spend and output performance, but require early mobilisation, flexible intervention design and active performance management to mitigate the risk of underspend, particularly for capital activity.
- (ii) Capital projects and outcome-heavy interventions need realistic timeframes, as many behavioural, economic and usage-related outcomes (e.g., footfall, sustained employment) are unlikely to fully materialise within short delivery periods. Where timescales or resources limit achievement during the Programme, mechanisms and resources should be in place to capture outcomes after the formal end date to understand and better reflect the full impact of investment.
- (iii) High participation levels were often achieved earlier than measurable outcomes, especially within People and Skills and business support interventions. This demonstrates the need to recognise interim progress, including skills development, employability improvements and early business changes, as valid indicators of performance.
- (iv) Programme complexity can obscure performance trends, particularly where monitoring spans multiple Investment Priorities, funding streams and intervention types. This can create challenges in aggregating and interpreting results, particularly where overachievement in some areas offsets underperformance in others.

Performance: Summary

Despite a delayed start and a compressed delivery period, the Programme achieved a high level of financial delivery overall. By 31 March 2025, 92.6% of the Main UKSPF Programme allocation and 80.9% of the Rural Fund allocation had been spent, equating to 90.4% of the combined target. This represents a notable achievement given the scale and complexity of managing multiple Investment Priorities, capital and revenue budgets and parallel delivery of the Rural Fund. Overall, expenditure performance reflects effective financial oversight and delivery capacity within a challenging timeframe.

Output performance was generally high across Communities and Place, Supporting Local Business and People and Skills, with many interventions exceeding participation, engagement and activity targets. Significant levels of community involvement, cultural activity, business advisory support, innovation uptake and skills participation were achieved. In several areas, high engagement levels were achieved early with longer-term outcomes, such as sustained employment, business growth and increased footfall, expected to materialise over time.

Where outcome measures remain below target, this largely reflects the longer timescales associated with capital investment and economic or labour market change. Overall, the Programme has delivered wide reach, early evidence of impact and a solid foundation for continued benefits beyond the formal funding period.

4. Impact

4.1 Impact - Introduction

This section assesses the difference that investment through the UKSPF Main UKSPF Programme and the Rural Fund has made across the three Investment Priorities. Evidence from multiple sources is brought together to provide an overview of the outcomes and impacts achieved to date. It examines the impact of the Programme and its projects by examining the importance of local administration and drawing on feedback from project deliverers gathered through online surveys and direct engagement. This section also includes four detailed case studies that illustrate delivery in practice and concludes with lessons learned.

4.2 Importance of Local Administration

4.2.1 The locally managed nature of the UKSPF Programme was a significant factor in its overall performance and impact. Shropshire Council's direct oversight enabled clarity of purpose, flexibility in decision-making and a more responsive delivery model than had been possible under previous regional arrangements. This local approach was consistently highlighted during staff and stakeholder interviews, particularly by the Service Manager for Economy, Funding and Skills, who emphasised that the ability to administer the fund within Shropshire brought meaningful advantages for Programme quality, accountability and local relevance.

4.2.2 The Service Manager noted that when previous business support activity was delivered through the Marches LEP, *'the third-party organisation overseeing the fund meant that we lost accountability of how the programmes were delivered'*. In contrast, local administration meant Shropshire Council could *'set our own priorities and drive it ourselves'*, ensuring that funding decisions aligned closely with local economic and community needs. He also reflected on the variation across the Marches area, observing that *'we all manage the delivery of the projects differently, with different priorities'*, reinforcing the value of having direct control over Shropshire's allocation.

4.2.3 The Council's approach to staffing and Programme management was also identified as a major contributor to the quality of delivery. The Service Manager described how the dedicated UKSPF Team enabled rapid mobilisation despite a delayed start, stating that *'as soon as they were appointed they reacted quickly, they made up the time we had lost'*. He highlighted the importance of recruiting capable staff, noting *'We knew the best way to manage the delivery of the Programme was to bring in good resources. Hannah, Joy and Amy have been fantastic, they just picked it up and ran with it. Gary has managed the overall Programme well too'*.

4.2.4 Local administration also enhanced fairness and transparency. The Service Manager emphasised the Council's commitment to ensuring that funding was allocated to the organisations best placed to deliver high-quality activity, even when this meant not delivering services in-house. As he explained, *'it would have been easy to give ourselves the funding... but we made sure that the right organisations delivered, even if it meant that the Council lost out'*. This was viewed positively by partners and contributed to constructive relationships across the county.

4.2.5 Overall, the evaluation finds that the local management model enabled a more coherent, place-focused and accountable approach to delivery. It supported wide geographic coverage, diverse participation and high levels of engagement from delivery partners, underpinned by clear local priorities and effective Programme oversight. The evidence also highlights how delivery arrangements and commissioning approaches shaped delivery in practice, particularly in the context of short timescales and the need to mobilise activity quickly.

4.3 Communities and Place – Beneficiary Impact

4.3.1 Overview of Activity

The Communities and Place Investment Priority was allocated £3,345,217 (30.8%) of the Main UPSPF Programme and £1,589,503 (61.4%) of the Rural Fund. In total, 38 projects were supported across the two funding streams, with the Main UKSPF Programme delivering capital and revenue activity and the Rural Fund delivering capital investments. Taken together, these projects reached communities across the whole of Shropshire, from larger market towns such as Shrewsbury and Oswestry to rural settlements and smaller local centres. All the projects supported are provided in Appendix 1.

4.3.2 Delivery under this Investment Priority was notably diverse, reflecting the breadth of needs and opportunities identified in the Investment Plan. Projects ranged from improvements to heritage assets (such as the Montgomery Canal, Ellesmere Yard and Shrewsbury Castle) to enhancements to community facilities and cultural spaces (including projects such as Beacon on the Hill, the Cultural Compact, Cultural Hubs and Spokes and the Vital Hive). Investments also enhanced civic infrastructure through initiatives such as the Strategic Infrastructure Partnership, Civic Crowdfunding, community climate projects, green space support and enhancements to local markets. Capital-focused Rural Fund projects complemented this activity by improving access to the countryside, supporting market infrastructure, investing in green spaces and enabling place-based improvements including the Cambrian Railway Station in Oswestry.

Collectively, these interventions were designed to help communities thrive, build local pride and support long-term resilience.

4.3.3 The Communities and Place portfolio was guided by four high-level opportunities set out in the Shropshire Investment Plan. These centred on:

- (i) Building upon existing assets, resources and infrastructure, harnessing the potential of market towns to offer a wide range of activities, services and facilities that bring communities together and encouraging both physical and digital connection between different individuals, groups and localities;
- (ii) Offering support to boost cultural capacity and social cohesion, leading to an increasingly diversified cultural offer which will benefit younger people, older people, existing residents and those moving to the area in the wake of the pandemic and changing lifestyle priorities – offering all sectors of the community the chance to recognise and explore their aspirations and achieve their potential;
- (iii) Promoting understanding of climate change issues, environment and air quality, opportunities for carbon reduction and the benefits of active lifestyles, including working with the community through creation of new or updating existing defences for natural hazards – increasing healthy life expectancy, improving physical and mental wellbeing and enhancing pride in place; and
- (iv) Linking with the other two investment priorities, building social and physical infrastructure which supports development of improved employment and educational opportunities and a better understanding of the role of volunteering in supporting socio-economic outcomes, delivered through a combination of skills sharing activities, connections and signposting and provision of high-quality, desirable community and cultural spaces.

4.3.4 The portfolio of Communities and Place projects reflects these priorities, with benefits emerging around improved amenities, more vibrant and inclusive cultural and community offers, greater environmental engagement and enhanced opportunities for people to participate locally.

4.3.5 **Project Surveys – Communities and Place**

22 surveys were forwarded to funded organisations (including to some organisations delivering more than one project) and 16 responses were received, representing a 73% response rate. This high level of engagement in the survey provides a robust and representative picture of the views and experiences of the projects supported through the Communities and Place Investment Priority. Detailed survey responses are presented in an addendum to this evaluation.

4.3.6 **Activity**

The responses indicate a diverse mix of activity. The most commonly selected categories were Heritage, Culture or Tourism and Community Engagement or Volunteering initiatives, each identified by over a third of respondents (six). Community Facility or Building Improvements were selected by a quarter of respondents (four). Smaller, but still notable proportions reported activity relating to Green Space, Environment or Nature projects (two respondents) and Town Centre or Public Realm Enhancements (two respondents).

In addition, four respondents selected ‘Other’, highlighting activity focused on active travel, children and young people, arts and cultural delivery and voluntary and community sector infrastructure support.

4.3.7 **Levels of Success**

Overall, respondents reported very positive levels of success for their Communities and Place projects. The majority (10 responses, 62.5%) felt their project had been very successful and a further five, 31%, described their work as mostly successful. Only one respondent reported mixed success and none felt their project had experienced limited or no success.

These results suggest that, despite the challenges faced, project deliverers generally view their activity as having achieved positive outcomes and made a meaningful contribution within their communities.

4.3.8 **Challenges**

Table 10: Challenges in Delivery (Communities and Place)

Can you indicate the challenges in delivering these activities?	Percentage %	Number of responses
Staffing or volunteer capacity	38.46%	5
Monitoring or reporting requirements	38.46%	5
Delays in approvals or procurement	23.08%	3
Delays in planning requirements/planning permission	15.38%	2
Supply chain or cost increases	15.38%	2
Community engagement or participation	15.38%	2
Engagement with referral partners	7.69%	1
Match funding or resources	7.69%	1
Other	53.85%	7

For Communities and Place projects, the majority of respondents (13, 81%) reported experiencing challenges during delivery, with only three, 19%, indicating they faced no difficulties.

Those respondents that experienced challenges, the most common issues were staffing or volunteer capacity and monitoring or reporting requirements, each affecting around 38% of projects. Delays in approvals, planning, supply chain issues and community engagement were also cited, though less frequently. Additionally, over half of respondents highlighted other challenges, particularly tight delivery schedules and adverse weather, with fixed deadlines often forcing outdoor work in winter. Some projects also faced capacity constraints, coordination across multiple organisations and quality or snagging issues. Overall, while administrative and staffing pressures were significant, timing and external factors such as weather were also key barriers to successful delivery.

‘Completion dates of 31/3 mean that builds are done throughout the winter where the weather plays a massive part and can cause delays’.

4.3.9 Impact

The UKSPF-funded projects have delivered significant and lasting impacts across Shropshire, combining physical improvements with enhanced community engagement and increased local pride. In Shrewsbury, public realm enhancements, including lighting, greening and new art installations, have created safer, more welcoming spaces for walking and cycling, while large-scale events such as the Shrewsbury Movement Festival have attracted national attention and substantially boosted visitor numbers, with footfall increases of up to 26% compared with previous years.

Beyond Shrewsbury, the Programme has strengthened community activity, volunteering and wellbeing across Shropshire. Youth engagement and mental health support have been enhanced through The Hive, while Crowdfunding initiatives have supported almost 900 participants and enabled 39 VCSE organisations to access funding, training and capacity-building support. Projects have increased cultural participation, preserved heritage buildings, improved community facilities and promoted energy efficiency and climate awareness. Practical improvements, including market accessibility, safer road crossings and enhanced public spaces, have been complemented by initiatives fostering social inclusion, peer support and digital engagement.

Overall, the interventions have created more vibrant, resilient and connected communities, boosting both local quality of life and visitor engagement.

‘The project as enabled community ideas to be supported and turned into delivery. A wide range of people have benefitted with outcomes including social inclusion, peer support, digital inclusion, improved wellbeing and health, tackling inequalities and disadvantage and celebrating arts and culture’ - Crowdfund Shropshire (Civic Crowdfunding)

‘The project has improved the facility for both the market traders and more importantly their customers, the building is more accessible and more attractive. Footfall has increased’ – Oswestry Town Council (Oswestry Market).

4.3.10 Outcomes and Evidence

The majority of respondents (11, 69%) rated their projects as very effective in achieving intended outcomes, with the remaining five, 31%, describing them as quite effective and no projects being reported as only partly or not effective. This suggests overall considerable confidence in the ability of the interventions to deliver their goals. Evidence to support impact

was gathered using a variety of methods: social media and press coverage was the most commonly used (11, 69%) while before-and-after photos, participant feedback, visitor/usage data and case studies were each used by half of respondents.

Additional evidence included economic or footfall data, referral and retention figures and other metrics such as videos, stakeholder feedback, service outcome measures, social value data and quantitative activity participation.

Collectively, this demonstrates a robust approach to monitoring and evaluation, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to capture both tangible outputs and broader community impact, reinforcing the effectiveness of the projects.

4.3.11 Results and Achievements

Projects were invited to describe the difference their project had made locally. Some of the responses are provided below:

- In Shrewsbury, 180 subsidised e-bikes have been made available, 7 e-cargo bikes now support local businesses and 10 Safe Cycle Pods provide secure bike storage.
- Public-realm enhancements, including improved lighting, art installations, murals from 21 artists .
- Community engagement activities, including the Shrewsbury Movement Festival where over 110 people attended the launch event and the 2 day Market Square Festival that saw 26% increase in footfall compared to the previous Saturday.
- Five new parklets, have made spaces safer and more attractive.
- Across Shropshire, 30 projects supported by Vibrant Shropshire delivered 522 events, 374 volunteer opportunities and engaged 8,671 people, while Crowdfund Shropshire awarded 31 grants, enabling 106 activities and securing over £313,000 in investment.
- Heritage, green space and market improvements have enhanced facilities, increased usage and provided accessible opportunities for community participation, such as the Beacon on the Hill heritage site and Oswestry Greenway.
- The Cambrian Station Restoration achieved regional recognition, with the project winning the BAM Nutall Partnership Award at the National Heritage Railway Awards 2025
- Social and wellbeing impacts including the Vital Hive initiatives that have provided youth engagement, play therapy and counselling, with one project described as *'transformative and impactful'*.
- Armed Forces Outreach engaged 955 people and led 9 organisations to sign the armed forces covenant.
- Shropshire Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure Support programme created 522 volunteering opportunities and supported 36 organisations.
- Climate and energy projects engaged 'hundreds' through workshops and training
- Culture Hubs & Spokes reached 2,250 audience members, with 40% attending for the first time.

Collectively, these interventions demonstrate lasting improvements in infrastructure, community engagement, environmental sustainability and social wellbeing. The UKSPF-funded projects have delivered tangible enhancements across Shropshire, improving community spaces, enriching cultural activity and creating a more connected, vibrant and resilient place for residents and visitors alike.

4.3.12 Additional Benefits

Table 11: Additional Benefits (Communities and Place)

Did the support offer any additional benefits beyond your expectations?	Percentage %	Number of responses
Strengthened local partnerships or community networks	75%	12
Increased community participation or volunteer engagement	56.25%	9
Improved wellbeing or social inclusion outcomes	56.25%	9
Generated positive media or local attention	56.25%	9
Improved local pride or sense of place	31.25%	5
Enhanced capacity of local organisations to deliver services	43.75%	7
Improved collaboration with local authorities or partners	43.75%	7
Attracted additional funding or investment into the area	43.75%	7
Greater use of community assets or spaces	37.50%	6
Other	6.25%	1

The survey responses provided in Table 11 indicate that the UKSPF Main UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund support delivered a range of benefits beyond initial expectations, reinforcing the wider impact of the Programme. Most notably, 75% (12) of respondents reported that their projects strengthened local partnerships or community networks, while over half highlighted increases in community or volunteer participation and engagement, improved wellbeing, social inclusion and positive media attention. Other outcomes included enhanced organisational capacity, greater use of community assets, improved collaboration with local authorities and additional funding or investment.

One respondent noted that *'all the above benefits were achieved and aligned with our expected outcomes,'* reflecting the programme's ability to exceed expectations and generate multiple positive effects across communities.

4.4 Supporting Local Business – Beneficiary Impact

4.4.1 Overview of Activity

The Supporting Local Business Investment Priority was allocated £5,900,000 (54.4%) of the Main UKSPF Programme and £1,000,000 (38.6%) of the Rural Fund. Delivery was undertaken across a broad portfolio of business support, innovation, skills development and market-development initiatives, complemented by targeted capital investment through the Rural Fund. In total, 28 projects were supported across the two funding streams, with activity delivered in Shropshire's towns, rural communities, business corridors and key employment locations. All projects supported through this Priority are listed in Appendix 1.

4.4.2 Delivery within the Supporting Local Business Priority reflected the wide-ranging needs of Shropshire's diverse economy and the ambitions set out in the Investment Plan. Projects provided a mix of direct support to businesses, sector-specific growth programmes and strategic interventions designed to enhance the broader environment for enterprise. These included intensive specialist business support, targeted upskilling programmes, employer-focused services, start-up development and sectoral initiatives covering manufacturing, agri-tech, clean growth and low-carbon innovation. Complementary place-based interventions enhanced town centre vibrancy, supported local business networks, enhanced market town infrastructure and promoted Shropshire as an attractive place to work, invest and grow. Rural

Fund investment added a further dimension through capital support for small equipment purchases, enabling micro and small businesses to improve productivity, adopt greener practices and unlock growth opportunities.

4.4.3 The Supporting Local Business portfolio was shaped by four key-level opportunities identified within the Shropshire Investment Plan. These centred on:

- (i) Providing the right tools and support to facilitate businesses to invest in research and development, relocate to Shropshire or expand and grow in their physical locations and workforce, particularly in relation to sustainability and green industry and the creative and cultural sectors;
- (ii) Championing investment in wider infrastructure that underpins business investment, focused on town centres and high streets, business parks and growth corridors - recognising the potential to establish hubs providing support to supply chains and individuals moving into the county to access and develop its strengths and opportunities and exploring affordable, flexible co-working space in key locations;
- (iii) Working collaboratively with the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and business improvement districts, assisting businesses to gain support through recovery funds, UKSPF and other relevant funding; and
- (iv) Linking with the other two investment priorities to provide appropriate housing, connectivity, networks and workplace progression through training and upskilling, so the County has the right workforce to enable economic growth and prosperity and can grow the working age population.

4.4.4 The Supporting Local Business portfolio demonstrates a broad and ambitious commitment to strengthening Shropshire's economic base, with projects delivering targeted support for start-ups, growth-oriented SMEs, manufacturers and agri-tech innovators. Collectively, the Programme is fostering more resilient enterprise networks, improved leadership and workforce skills, enhanced competitiveness and productivity and greater readiness for digital and low-carbon transformation.

4.4.5 [Project Surveys – Supporting Local Business](#)

24 surveys were forwarded to funded organisations and 13 responses were received, representing a 54% response rate. This high level of engagement provides a robust and representative picture of the views and experiences of the project deliverers supported through the Supporting Local Business Investment Priority. Detailed survey responses are presented in an addendum to this evaluation.

4.4.6 [Activity](#)

The responses show a clear concentration of activity around direct business advice and growth support, with nine respondents (69%) identifying this as part of their offer. This reflects an emphasis on improving business resilience, capability and performance. Around a quarter of respondents (three projects) delivered business growth grants, while a smaller proportion focused on start-up support (two respondents) and innovation, R&D or technology adoption (one) indicating that early-stage and innovation-focused interventions formed a more limited element of the overall Programme.

No respondents reported activity relating to exporting or internationalisation or premises or workspace adaptations, suggesting these areas were not a delivery priority within this cohort.

In addition, three project deliverers selected ‘Other’, highlighting activity including funded training for existing staff, feasibility studies to inform future growth strategies and events to test demand for new business networks.

Overall, the findings point to a Programme primarily centred on advisory and capability-building support, complemented by targeted grant funding and exploratory activity designed to shape future business growth opportunities.

4.4.7 Levels of Success

Overall, respondents reported highly positive assessments of their Supporting Local Business projects. Over three quarters (10, 77%) felt their project had been very successful, reflecting confidence in both the outcomes achieved and the value delivered to participating businesses. A smaller proportion (one, 8%) described their project as mostly successful, while two respondents (15%) indicated limited success, highlighting that for a minority of projects, challenges may have constrained delivery or impact. No respondents reported mixed or no success.

These results suggest that, on the whole, project deliverers view their work as having made a meaningful contribution to business growth and resilience, with only a small number experiencing more significant barriers to achieving their intended outcomes.

4.4.8 Challenges in Delivery (Supporting Local Business)

Table 12: Challenges in Delivery (Supporting Local Business)

Can you indicate the challenges in delivering these activities?	Percentage %	Number of responses
Business engagement or take-up	75%	6
Timescale for delivery	37.5%	3
Amount of funding available	25%	2
Engagement with referral partners, e.g. Growth Hub/Chamber	12.5%	1
Monitoring or reporting requirements	12%	1
Staffing or specialist expertise	0%	0
Costs and resources	0%	0
Other	25%	2

Respondents were asked to identify the challenges they faced when delivering their project/s. 61.5% (eight) of respondents reported experiencing challenges in delivering their projects, while a notable 38.5% (five) indicated they faced no challenges at all. This is a positive finding, suggesting that a substantial proportion of projects were able to deliver their activities smoothly and without significant barriers. The balance of responses indicates that, although challenges were relatively common across the Programme, many projects were well-planned, appropriately resourced or sufficiently aligned with business needs to proceed without major difficulties.

Most respondents identifying challenges reported experiencing at least one challenge, with business engagement or take-up emerging as the most widespread issue (six, 75%). Over a third of respondents also highlighted timescales for delivery, suggesting that compressed programme windows or fixed deadlines placed pressure on planning and implementation. A quarter identified the amount of funding available as a challenge, while individual respondents highlighted difficulties relating to engagement with referral partners and monitoring or reporting requirements.

The ‘Other’ responses provide useful context. One project noted exceptionally high demand that required an extension, while another emphasised that small businesses often struggle to find time for training or support, even when willing to engage. Taken together, these findings suggest that demand, capacity within small businesses and delivery timescales were the most prominent constraints, with administrative and partnership-related challenges affecting a smaller proportion of projects.

4.4.9 Impact

Respondents were asked what difference had their project/s made to local businesses. The responses indicate that UKSPF-funded business projects have delivered clear and meaningful benefits for enterprises across Shropshire, helping them to grow, adapt and build long-term resilience.

Grant support and tailored business programmes enabled firms to expand operations, safeguarded jobs and, in many cases, create new roles. Many businesses reported improved productivity, clearer strategic direction and more efficient systems, with several projects directly contributing to increased turnover, profitability and employment. Leadership and skills programmes also had a noticeable effect, with participants gaining confidence in decision-making, financial management and strategic planning. These changes have supported business growth and long-term development.

The Supporting Local Business Investment Priority has also fostered innovation and collaboration. Peer-learning groups such as the Evolving Business Cohort created new partnerships, joint projects and shared marketing opportunities, with many relationships continuing beyond the funded activity. Businesses involved in Visit Shropshire’s destination marketing benefitted from increased visibility, higher enquiry levels and improved digital engagement. Workshops covering digital marketing, content creation, accessibility and sustainability helped hundreds of businesses enhance their skills, improve their online presence and add value to their customer offer.

Environmental and operational improvements have also been significant. Energy and sustainability projects supported businesses to reduce costs, cut carbon emissions and adopt more efficient processes. Specialist support for employers has helped build confidence in recruiting and retaining a more diverse workforce. Feasibility studies and pilot initiatives have laid the groundwork for future growth in areas such as the green economy, local business networks and sector-specific development.

Overall, the Programme has helped create a more capable, connected and confident business community across Shropshire, with impacts expected to extend well beyond the funding period.

‘Grant funding has enabled retailers and hospitality venues to adapt their operations, diversify their offer and respond effectively to challenging economic conditions. As a direct result, businesses have safeguarded existing jobs, created new roles, and strengthened their capacity to grow. Many participants report increased productivity, improved systems and clearer business direction thanks to tailored support through the Work in Shrewsbury programme’.
Shrewsbury BID

‘Business Performance Turnover: 75% of respondents reported an increase since completing the programme. Employment: Around 24% reported employment growth. Additionality: 78% of those with turnover growth and 71% with profitability growth attributed these improvements directly to Shropshire Leadership Programme’. Aston University

‘The Shropshire Manufacturing Grant Programme improved productivity and sustainability, increased digitalisation, created job opportunities, and encouraged the adoption of innovative products and services’. Oxford Innovation Advice

‘The Marches Energy Grant enabled cost savings, improved efficiencies and carbon reduction (tonnes co2)’. Worcestershire County Council

4.4.10 Outcomes and Evidence

Most business-facing projects reported positive progress toward their intended outcomes, with nearly two thirds (eight, 62%) describing their work as very effective and a further three, 23%, as quite effective. Only a small proportion (two, 15%) felt their projects had been only partly effective and none reported limited impact, indicating that the majority of interventions delivered meaningful benefits for participating businesses.

A wide range of evidence was used to assess impact, reflecting a balanced approach to monitoring. Business feedback and testimonials were the most common sources (11, 85%), while quantitative measures such as the number of businesses supported (10, 77%) and jobs created or safeguarded (four, 31%) provided additional insight into economic outcomes. Over half of respondents (seven, 54%) produced case studies and nearly half drew on social media or press activity to demonstrate their reach. Innovation indicators, such as new products or processes, were also captured by several projects.

Other forms of evidence included detailed energy audit reports and ongoing engagement with sector partners to identify emerging needs. Collectively, the variety of methods used, spanning qualitative narrative and numerical data, indicates that project deliverers were able to track both immediate outputs and wider business improvements, helping to demonstrate the value and influence of UKSPF-funded activity.

4.4.11 Results and Achievements

Projects were invited to describe the difference their project had made locally. Some of the responses are provided below:

- Future Shrewsbury Grants provided support to 52 businesses.
- The Visit Shropshire Destination Development Programme supported wider training and workshop programmes, engaging 173 businesses to improve skills in digital marketing, first aid, social media and experience development.
- Leadership and innovation initiatives supported 88 businesses through the Shropshire Leadership Programme.
- The Upskilling Project enabled 414 individuals from 161 businesses to undertake fully funded training.
- Environmental and net zero activity also delivered notable gains, including 261 tonnes of carbon saved annually through the Marches Energy Grant and over 7,000 tonnes of carbon savings identified by Shropshire Net Zero Leaders.
- Further added value was demonstrated by the £325,000 leveraged investment secured through the Green Growth and Severn Valley Water Management work.

Businesses reported enhanced online performance, new collaborations, improved customer engagement and the development of new products and visitor experiences. As one participant noted, the support *‘opened the door to opportunities we would never have reached alone’*.

Collectively, these achievements highlight the significant economic and developmental impact delivered across Shropshire’s business base.

4.4.12 Additional Benefits

Table 13: Additional Benefits (Supporting Local Business)

Did the support offer any additional benefits beyond your expectations?	Percentage %	Number of responses
Stronger business networks or collaborations formed	84.62%	11
Increased local supply chain activity	23.08%	3
New markets or customers identified	15.38%	2
Unexpected innovation or product development	15.38%	2
Improved staff retention or morale	30.77%	4
Raised business profile or reputation	76.92%	10
Increased investor or partner interest	15.38%	2
Additional funding or resources secured as a result	53.85%	7
Strengthened relationships with local authorities or support organisations	53.85%	7
Follow-on opportunities or funding identified	38.46%	5
Other	0%	0

The responses in Table 13 suggest that the UKSPF Main UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund created several unanticipated benefits alongside their core objectives. The most frequently reported outcome was the formation of enhanced business networks or collaborations (11, 85%) highlighting the Programme’s role in fostering connections that extend beyond individual projects. Raised business profile or reputation was also significant (10, 77%) indicating that many businesses experienced increased visibility and engagement. Over half of respondents secured additional funding or resources or developed closer relationships with local authorities and support organisations, demonstrating clear added value. Other benefits included improved staff morale, new market opportunities and follow-on funding prospects.

One respondent highlighted the cumulative impact of this support, noting that *‘the project helped us build partnerships and attract new interest we hadn’t anticipated’*.

4.5 People and Skills – Beneficiary Impact

4.5.1 Overview of Activity

The People and Skills Investment Priority was allocated £1,600,000 (14.8%) of the Main UKSPF Programme. It was designed to strengthen the skills base, widen participation and support residents to access and progress in employment. Unlike the other two Investment Priorities, activity was phased to begin later in the Programme, with the project calls taking place in May 2023 (with delivery commencing from October 2023) and December 2023 (with delivery commencing from April 2024 onwards). All projects supported through this Priority are listed in Appendix 1.

4.5.2 Delivery was undertaken through a series of five targeted projects delivered by four specialist providers, spanning employability support, digital skills development, basic and life skills provision, employer-linked training and tailored in-work progression support. Together, these interventions aimed to build Shropshire’s workforce capabilities, reduce digital exclusion and address local labour supply challenges.

4.5.3 The design and delivery of the People and Skills portfolio were shaped by the key opportunities identified in the Shropshire UKSPF Investment Plan. These centred on:

- (i) Improving the skills profile of the working-age population, responding to the 19,600 residents with only Level 1 qualifications and the 8,300 with no qualifications. Enhancing basic, functional, vocational and higher-level skills remains essential to raising productivity and enabling residents to access better-quality employment;
- (ii) Reducing digital exclusion, particularly among older people, rural residents and low-income households groups for whom limited digital access restricts participation in employment, training and essential online services;
- (iii) Supporting older residents and those in rural areas to gain the skills required to remain socially connected, access digital public services and maintain independence and quality of life;
- (iv) Maximising opportunities from digital infrastructure investment, including wider rollout of superfast broadband, gigabit capability and 5G, by upskilling local people for digital jobs and creating pathways into high-skill, high-wage sectors aligned with future growth; and
- (iv) Supporting the transition to a more productive, future-ready labour market, where residents are equipped with transferable, technical and digital skills that enable them to progress, adapt and contribute to Shropshire's long-term economic resilience.

4.5.4 Delivery under the People and Skills Priority reflected the diverse needs and opportunities identified in the Shropshire Investment Plan, with a clear focus on improving skills levels across the working-age population, supporting economically inactive residents, tackling digital exclusion and enabling progression into higher-skill, higher-wage roles.

4.5.5 [Project Surveys – People and Skills](#)

Surveys were forwarded to the four delivery organisations and three responses were received, providing a representative view of the support provided through the People and Skills Investment Priority. Detailed survey responses are presented in an addendum to this evaluation.

4.5.6 [Activity](#)

Across the three respondents, projects focused primarily on training and skills development, with all deliverers providing structured learning opportunities. Two projects offered basic skills and employability or work-readiness support, reflecting a significant emphasis on helping participants progress towards the labour market. Digital skills development featured in one project, while another provided targeted support for those furthest from employment. Collectively, the activity represents a blend of practical training, foundational skills and tailored employability interventions aimed at improving participants' confidence, capability and future prospects.

4.5.7 [Levels of Success](#)

Respondents reported positive levels of success for their People and Skills projects, with all three deliverers indicating that their activity had achieved its intended outcomes. One respondent rated its project as very successful, while the remaining two described theirs as mostly successful. These findings suggest that, despite the varied needs of participants and delivery contexts, projects generally felt able to deliver meaningful support and create tangible benefits for individuals engaging with skills, training and employability activities.

4.5.8 [Challenges](#)

Most respondents (two out of three) reported no challenges in delivering their People and Skills activities, indicating that for the majority of projects, delivery ran smoothly and without

major barriers. One project did experience difficulties, primarily linked to engaging and retaining participants, as well as supporting individuals with complex needs. Low confidence and motivation among participants also contributed to these challenges. While issues were limited to a single project, they highlight the intensive support often required when working with individuals who face multiple barriers to skills development and employment.

4.5.9 Impact

The People and Skills projects have contributed meaningfully to improving participants' confidence, skills and readiness for work. Respondents reported that individuals gained practical abilities, enhanced digital capability and clearer pathways for career progression or change. The projects also supported personal development, including improved employability, communication skills and the confidence needed to sustain employment. These outcomes reflect the tailored, hands-on nature of the support provided, helping participants build both competence and motivation.

'Additional skills, and knowledge transfer related to a specific vocation for career progression or change of career'. - Shropshire Chamber of Commerce (Shropshire Skills Hub)

4.5.10 Outcomes and Evidence

The survey results indicate that People and Skills projects were viewed as highly effective in achieving their intended outcomes. One respondent rated their activity as very effective, while the remainder described their projects as quite effective. This reflects a clear sense that interventions are helping participants gain skills, confidence and improved readiness for work.

Projects used a varied evidence base to assess their impact. All respondents reported capturing qualification achievements, while two respondents used attendance or engagement tracking, participant feedback, pre- and post-programme assessments, progression data and referral information. Case studies and social media coverage were also used to demonstrate individual progress and wider engagement.

Taken together, these methods illustrate a balanced approach to evaluation, combining numerical measures with participant insight to evidence improvements in skills, confidence and employability.

4.5.11 Results and Achievements

Deliverers were asked to describe the difference their projects had made for participants. Key achievements included:

- Digital Shropshire supported 280 learners to develop essential digital skills, helping participants improve confidence, employability and readiness for further training.
- The UKSPF Shropshire Skills Hub funded 412 course places for 412 individuals, resulting in 409 qualifications, certificates or licences being achieved against a target of 400, demonstrating high levels of completion and progression.
- Step Up/Ignite (Apr–Nov 2025) received 180 referrals, with 35 people moving into employment, 83 reporting improved interpersonal or life skills and 121 receiving targeted support to move closer to work.

Collectively, these outcomes illustrate the positive contribution that UKSPF-funded skills activity has made in helping residents gain qualifications, build confidence and transition into work or further learning.

4.5.12 Additional Benefits

The survey indicates that projects delivered several positive outcomes for participants and the community, beyond initial expectations. Most commonly (two out of three respondents), reported that participants gained confidence or motivation, improved digital skills and progressed into further training, volunteering or employment. Wellbeing benefits were also reported, with one project noting improvements in mental health. Wider community impacts included increased awareness of available skills programmes and better reach into under-represented groups, demonstrating that activity extended beyond direct learning to support inclusion and local engagement.

Delivery organisations also reported added value. Two of the three providers experienced improved soft skills within their teams, enhanced staff learning and better employer links or placements. Collaboration with training providers and employers and the creation of new partnerships or networks was universal among respondents, highlighting significant relationship-building benefits. Some organisations also secured additional resources or noted higher engagement than anticipated, suggesting that Programme participation supported organisational development as well as learner outcomes.

4.6 UKSPF Programme Team Support and Impact

4.6.1 As part of the survey questions, all project deliverers in the three Investment Priorities were asked about any examples of how the Team may have added value or provided support beyond what they had expected and whether they had any suggestions for improving delivery or support in future programmes.

4.6.2 The UKSPF Programme Team was widely praised for being approachable, responsive and proactive, providing support beyond expectations. Key team members, including Gary Spence, Hannah Smith, Joy Holland and Amy Farley, were singled out for their reliability, problem-solving and guidance through complex processes such as reporting, eligibility and project delivery. Recipients valued upfront payments, flexible support and opportunities to collaborate or access wider networks. Suggestions for future improvements focused on:

- Streamlining reporting;
- Extending delivery timescales;
- Increasing engagement with small organisations; and
- Facilitating networking and alignment across projects.

Overall, the Team was considered an enabling partner, helping projects run smoothly, efficiently and with confidence.

‘As our key contact Hannah has been supportive, approachable and reliable throughout the whole process’

‘Joy and Gary were always available to chat things through... Extremely helpful and accommodating’

‘Amy Farley regularly goes above and beyond to provide any help or advice that the School of Coding team requires’

‘They are always quick to reply with positive and constructive advice and have a ‘can do attitude’

‘Efficient and timely processing and payment of claims’

‘Time scale is always the challenge- but I appreciate this is outside of your control’

4.7 Considerations for Future Delivery

4.7.1 Within the survey, delivery partners were asked whether they had any suggestions for improving delivery or support in future programmes and if more funding was available, what would be the top priorities for supporting communities, businesses and individuals across Shropshire.

4.7.2 Feedback highlights a consistent set of assumptions and considerations that are likely to shape the effective delivery of any future programmes in Shropshire:

- (i) Programme design, timescales and funding flexibility
Many organisations noted that short delivery windows, fixed financial year end dates and limited ability to carry funding forward constrained delivery, particularly for place-based, capital or seasonal activity. Longer programme durations, earlier award decisions and greater flexibility around spend profiles were seen as important for enabling delivery partners to plan, procure and embed activity more effectively. This was reinforced by calls for funding models that better reflect the operational realities of VCSE organisations, including consideration of payment in advance or mixed payment approaches and more realistic overhead allowances.
- (ii) Proportionate monitoring and reporting
While delivery partners broadly recognised the importance of accountability, several highlighted that reporting requirements were resource-intensive, particularly for smaller organisations and community-led groups. Suggestions included streamlining defrayal evidence, adopting a core minimum dataset for smaller awards and tailoring monitoring expectations to project scale and risk. There was also appetite for clearer upfront guidance and onboarding support, such as webinars, to improve understanding of requirements and reduce administration during delivery.
- (iii) Capacity building, collaboration and networking
Delivery organisations valued opportunities to connect with each other, share learning and collaborate, but felt these could be improved further through more structured networking, facilitated introductions and collaborative events. This applied equally to VCSE organisations, cultural projects, business support providers and external delivery partners seeking to integrate into Shropshire’s local networks. There was also recognition of the importance of continued infrastructure support for the voluntary and community sector to sustain delivery capacity at a local level.

4.7.3 Looking ahead, delivery partners identified clear priorities for future investment that align closely with the challenges observed during programme delivery, these are as follows:

- (i) Communities and Place: longer-term revenue funding for community wellbeing, youth provision, rural initiatives, grassroots organisations and climate-related activity, alongside continued investment in town centres, heritage, active travel and community infrastructure.
- (ii) Supporting Local Business: sustained access to high-quality business advice, grants, skills development, innovation support and Net Zero activity, with an emphasis on progression, scalability and sector-specific support rather than one-off interventions.
- (iii) People and Skills: partners highlighted the value of modular and progression-focused skills provision, closer integration with employers and continued emphasis on employability, work-readiness and in-work progression.

Cambrian Railway Station Shropshire Council

CAMBRIAN HERITAGE RAILWAYS

Cambrian Heritage Railways (CHR) is a volunteer-led charity dedicated to preserving and revitalising Oswestry's rich railway heritage. The Cambrian Station Building, a Grade II-listed Victorian landmark dating back to the 1860s, once served as both Oswestry's principal station and the headquarters of the Cambrian Railway. Although still used seasonally by CHR, decades of deterioration meant the building required urgent intervention to make it safe, prevent further decay and secure its future.

To address this, Shropshire Council secured £765,250 from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (Communities & Place) and the Rural England Prosperity Fund in November 2023, alongside £271,108 of its own capital. The funding enabled a substantial programme of essential external works, including replacing 300 ornate corbels, removing asbestos roof tiles and reinstating Welsh slate and fully repainting windows and doors in authentic Cambrian Railway colours. Ecological enhancements, such as bat roosting tiles and swift nesting boxes, were incorporated into the restoration. Local conservation specialists Phillips and Curry Ltd delivered the restoration, supporting heritage craftsmanship within the region.

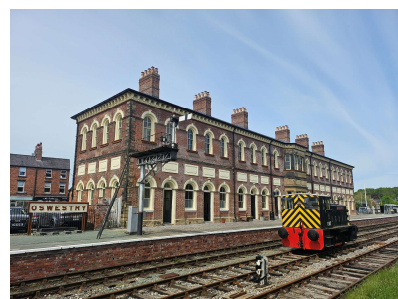
The project had to be completed within a tight timescale and through challenging winter conditions, requiring careful coordination to keep the programme on track without compromising quality. As the Project Manager explained: *"The funding gave us the flexibility to do the work the right way, with a high degree of quality instead of just patching things up. The corbels will last over 100 years."*

Shropshire Council also commissioned Insall Architects to produce a conservation management plan, a full condition survey and a feasibility study. These now form the basis for future phases, including potential first-floor residential use and year-round operation with CHR.

The restoration has already achieved regional recognition, with the project winning the BAM Nutall Partnership Award at the National Heritage Railway Awards 2025. Judges praised the "outstanding" quality of the work delivered on a modest budget, commending the Council and its partners for safeguarding a landmark asset, working with local artisans and overcoming unplanned challenges while maintaining momentum.

Community response has been overwhelmingly positive. The Project Manager noted the public interest when the scaffolding was removed: *"We put out a press release and CHR planned a grand reopening at Easter. We were inundated with visitors, more people came to see what we'd done with the building than to visit the railway itself."* The reaction reflected a sense of local pride in seeing an iconic Oswestry landmark restored to prominence.

Without UKSPF and REPF investment, the Council would have been unable to address urgent safety issues or undertake the specialist studies required for long-term reuse. The funding has stabilised a highly significant heritage asset, enhanced Oswestry's visitor offer and laid firm foundations for future development and community benefit.



Vital Hive

HMM Arts Ltd (The Hive)



The Hive is a creative and wellbeing charity based in Shrewsbury, supporting children, young people, families and vulnerable adults across Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin. Its Vital Hive initiative has widened access to inclusive arts experiences for people facing challenges in their lives, including care-experienced young people, young carers, autistic young adults and families living in poverty.

The Hive secured £99,987 from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (Communities & Place) in November 2023 and delivered 120 creative activities, supported 28 volunteering opportunities and facilitated 101 community-led arts, cultural and heritage sessions by March 2025. This growth was enabled by expanded staffing, dedicated youth engagement roles and targeted outreach. As the CEO explained, *“We act as a conduit between projects and young people who are dealing with difficult things in their lives. Early intervention is critical and this funding has helped us to make that possible.”*

A major development was the expanded Amplify project, offering workshops, mentoring, rehearsal space and opportunities to programme gigs. One young participant, who was awaiting a court date at the time of joining, made exceptional progress, as the Lead Programmes and Projects Manager explained *‘he made new friends, re-wrote the narrative and really engaged. It not only helped him but also the whole family.’* Amplify has since secured Youth Music funding to continue beyond March 2026.

Partnerships underpinned Vital Hive. Work with Shropshire Supports Refugees enabled access to families who rarely take part in cultural events, while activity in Meole Brace, on the outskirts of Shrewsbury, helped revitalise and restructure an existing youth club, encouraging many more young people to attend. The club is now a CIC and can apply for funding to support its future sustainability.

Volunteering became a defining feature of the project, with some young adults, who had accessed the support through Vital Hive, helping to deliver events including the 2024 Street Festival. *“Volunteering is an important aspect. It gives a sense of belonging”* the CEO noted. One young person has since joined The Hive’s Board of Trustees.

UKSPF also supported extensive staff and volunteer development, enabling The Hive to invest in the skills, confidence and capability of everyone involved in delivery. Training included safeguarding, and active by-stander training, helping the organisation meet key quality assurance standards, improve practice and better meet the needs of participants. As the CEO noted, *“The amount of different training the project has provided has been incredible.”*

While the project faced challenges, including short timescales in which to deliver and significant monitoring requirements, the support from Council was highly valued. The team noted that having responsive and accessible officers made a real difference to keeping the project on track *“Hannah and Gary were so helpful. Hannah turned things around so quickly and did everything she could to help.”*

Without UKSPF, The Hive would not have been able to extend its offer at this scale. Vital Hive has created accessible creative spaces, broadened inclusion and delivered meaningful outcomes for young people and families across Shropshire.

Shropshire APF and AGRI

Aston University



Additive manufacturing, or 3D printing, is transforming product design and production, yet the high cost of industrial-grade technology places it beyond the reach of most SMEs. Aston University's Advanced Prototyping Facility (APF) was created to make this technology accessible, offering businesses hands-on design and manufacturing support. Building on its success in Birmingham, Aston University extended the model into Shropshire through two UKSPF-funded projects: Shropshire APF and AGRI. The Shropshire APF received £396,707 UKSPF and was open to all sectors based in Shropshire whilst AGRI received £274,972 and focused on agri-tech, food and drink businesses. The projects offered support with product design, prototyping and adopting additive manufacturing technologies. It also provided digital design support, software/tools and advice for design-for-manufacture. Both projects aimed to help SMEs innovate, adopt new technologies and strengthen in-house design and digital capability.

Drawing on previous ERDF experience, the University was able to mobilise quickly with Shropshire APF launching in July 2023 and AGRI following in November. The support provided by UKSPF funding mainly covered staffing, placement students and commercial software licences, while the University provided specialist equipment and expertise. This enabled fully funded technical support enabling businesses to work directly with engineers and designers to refine products, test materials and build innovation confidence.

The two projects achieved strong engagement. Shropshire APF supported 111 SMEs, 52 of which engaged in knowledge transfer and 12 adopted new technologies, creating 71 FTE jobs. AGRI supported 59 SMEs, engaging 34 in knowledge transfer, helping 40 adopt new technologies and developing 13 new-to-market products. A case study demonstrating support provided to a Shropshire business called Sonic Games Ltd can be found [here](#).

The project also enabled valuable opportunities for Aston University students, who gained real-world client experience through placements. One student, Kate, said: *"It's very different working with a company compared to doing coursework. I'm really grateful — I wouldn't be such a good designer now if I hadn't had this experience."* Two students went on to achieve first-class degrees, and one helped to secure a £30,000 contract for the University.

Over the course of the project, demand shifted significantly. Initially, around half of businesses sought prototyping and half digital support; by late 2024, this had increased to 80% digital support. The falling cost of 3D printers and the growing importance of branding and web presence drove this change. The introduction of a digital services strand, covering website creation, SEO and cyber audit further increased relevance and reach.

Paul Gretton, Senior project Manager, observed that while Aston University would have continued this work without UKSPF, progress would have been far slower and on a smaller scale. He said: *"UKSPF has enabled us to reach far more businesses in Shropshire and tailor our support to what they actually need. The mix of design, prototyping and digital skills has made a real difference to their ability to innovate and grow."*

Paul confirmed that Aston University intends to continue the work, albeit at a smaller scale, beyond the UKSPF period. Future delivery may adopt a low-cost, pay-to-participate model to maintain engagement with established client businesses. However, sustaining the same level of reach and impact will depend on access to external funding. Continued investment would ensure that this valuable support remains inclusive and that innovation among smaller businesses is not constrained by cost.

Ignite

Enable – Supported Employment Services Shropshire Council



The Ignite programme, funded through £417,590UKSPF, provided personalised employability and wellbeing support for people in Shropshire who were economically inactive or not currently able to consider employment. The programme offered a holistic package including confidence-building, emotional resilience, employability skills, careers advice, digital support and in-work assistance. Each participant was matched with a dedicated key worker who guided them from initial engagement through to employment or further training.

Key support workers played a central role in delivery. Their day typically involved working one-to-one with participants, completing a vocational profile, helping them build CVs, prepare job applications, practise interview skills and explore realistic career pathways. One support worker described face-to-face contact as one of the most effective aspects of the programme, enabling rapport to be built quickly and allowing support to be tailored to individual need. Early assessment and the use of personalised SMART action plans helped ensure that different ages, backgrounds and confidence levels could be supported appropriately.

Ignite served people with diverse and often complex needs. Participants included long-term unemployed, young people unsure about next steps, individuals recovering from poor health or people with limited qualifications and experience. Key workers adapted their approach to each person to build trust and identify what could make the biggest difference.

Despite challenges, particularly working with a wide age range and participants with multiple barriers, the programme delivered significant outcomes. Examples highlighted by a support worker included young people achieving the grades they needed to progress into their chosen careers and several participants, with criminal convictions, gaining their CSCS card and securing employment in construction. For Ignite, success was measured not just by job outcomes, but by stability, confidence, regular income and individuals feeling “*happy and content*” in their working lives.

Ignite also achieved wider community impact beyond its formal outputs. In Shrewsbury, the key worker noted that Ignite had become the ‘go-to programmes’ for young people needing support, with Jobcentre staff, community groups, parents and teachers routinely signposting individuals to the service. This visibility and trust allowed the programme to reach people who may otherwise have fallen out of the system.

Looking ahead, Enable suggested the programme could be strengthened by tailoring delivery by age group and involving experts-by-experience in group workshops, helping participants relate to stories from people “*in similar situations.*” Without UKSPF, the support would be far more limited, reduced to brief community-based meetings, ad-hoc training referrals and a single in-work support call before case closure.

The UKSPF investment has enabled a far more intensive and person-centred model. As a result, Ignite has supported people to rebuild confidence, gain qualifications, enter work and see a future for themselves that previously felt out of reach.

4.9 Impact – Lessons Learned

4.9.1 Overall, the Programme has delivered clear and positive impacts across communities, businesses and individuals, with significant evidence of short- and medium-term benefits despite compressed delivery timescales. Impact was most evident where interventions were locally grounded, well-targeted and delivered by trusted organisations with established links to beneficiaries. Set out below are the key lessons learned in relation to impact:

- (i) Future locally administered funds would benefit from clear local leadership, transparent decision-making and sufficient dedicated delivery capacity, enabling local authorities to shape programmes that respond effectively to local priorities. The evaluation also highlights that where delivery timescales are short, the direct commissioning of trusted delivery partners is critical to achieving timely and effective delivery, while avoiding disproportionate management and administrative burden on Programme teams.
- (ii) Impact often manifested first through qualitative and intermediate outcomes before longer-term economic or behavioural change could be fully evidenced. Improvements in confidence, skills, organisational capacity, collaboration and local pride were consistently reported across all three Investment Priorities, particularly within Communities and Place and People and Skills activity. Recognising these intermediate outcomes is essential to capturing the full contribution of place-based programmes operating within short timeframes.
- (iii) Partnership-based delivery amplified impact beyond individual projects. Many interventions generated additional benefits through strengthened networks, collaboration, referrals and shared learning between organisations. These relational impacts supported sustainability, follow-on activity and leveraged additional funding, indicating that UKSPF investment acted as a catalyst rather than a standalone intervention.
- (iv) Place-based and capital investments delivered visible, tangible change that supported wider social and economic outcomes. Improvements to community facilities, public realm, heritage assets and market infrastructure enhanced accessibility, participation and local pride, while also supporting footfall, visitor engagement and business activity. However, the full value of these investments is likely to continue to accrue over time, reinforcing the need for longer-term monitoring of place-based impact.
- (v) Supporting Local Business and People and Skills interventions demonstrated clear additionality where support was tailored, specialist and responsive to need. Evidence from these types of projects shows that targeted advice, grants and training contributed directly to improved productivity, employment outcomes, skills attainment and progression. Peer learning and cohort-based models were particularly effective in sustaining impact beyond the funded period.
- (vi) Robust impact evidence relies on a mixed-method approach. Projects that combined quantitative indicators (e.g. participation, jobs, qualifications, carbon savings) with qualitative evidence (e.g. case studies, testimonials, before-and-after data) were best able to articulate both scale and depth of impact. Continued support for proportionate but consistent evaluation approaches would deepen understanding of long-term outcomes in future programmes
- (vii) Evidence from delivery partners indicates that timescales, funding flexibility, monitoring requirements and opportunities for collaboration all influenced the scale, consistency and sustainability of outcomes achieved. Future programmes should be designed with

sufficient duration, proportionate administration and built-in mechanisms for coordination and shared learning, enabling delivery partners to maximise impact while reducing avoidable delivery pressures.

Impact: Summary

Despite a compressed delivery period, the Main UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund have delivered clear and wide-ranging impacts across Shropshire’s communities, businesses and residents. Through a combination of place-based capital investment, targeted business support, skills intervention and employability support, the Programme has generated tangible short- and medium-term benefits, with further impacts expected to continue to emerge beyond the formal funding period.

Shropshire Council’s local oversight played a key role in shaping impact, enabling funding to be aligned with local priorities, mobilised quickly and managed transparently. This approach supported effective management of public funds, high levels of partner engagement and flexible delivery across all three Investment Priorities.

Revenue and capital investment under Communities and Place delivered visible improvements to community facilities, cultural assets, green spaces and public realm, alongside high levels of participation in cultural and community activity. These interventions strengthened volunteering, organisational capacity and local pride, while establishing foundations for longer-term outcomes such as increased usage, footfall and wellbeing.

The Supporting Local Business Investment Priority generated significant economic benefits, with extensive enterprise engagement, innovation support and grant funding. Businesses reported improved productivity, resilience and confidence, alongside job creation and early growth outcomes. Capital investment, through the Rural Fund, supported rural businesses to modernise, adopt new technologies and improve operational efficiency, with further economic impacts expected to accrue over time.

Within People and Skills, interventions supported economically inactive and working residents to improve employability, gain qualifications, develop essential and vocational skills and enhance digital inclusion and capacity. Participants progressed into employment pathways and demonstrated improved readiness for work, recognising that sustained employment outcomes require longer-term engagement.

Looking ahead, the evaluation highlights that future impact will be influenced not only by the choice of interventions, but also by programme design and delivery conditions. Longer delivery timescales, proportionate monitoring and reporting and structured opportunities for collaboration and shared learning would support delivery partners to plan more effectively, embed activity and maximise long-term outcomes. Overall, the Programme has provided a firm platform for future investment by improving places, supporting jobs, developing businesses and improving workforce skills and employability across Shropshire.

5. Management and Delivery

5.1 Management and Delivery - Introduction

This section of the Evaluation reviews the management and delivery of the Shropshire UKSPF Investment Programme, focusing on Programme governance and management and delivery of the Investment Priorities. It also examines Shropshire Council's commitment in promoting equality and diversity in all its commissioned projects.

5.2 Programme Governance and Oversight

5.2.1 The Programme was governed by the SEP Board and represented by public, private, education and the voluntary sector. The SEP Board was established in December 2022 to provide the mechanism for delivery of the Economic Growth Strategy (EGS) 2022 – 27 and provide the required oversight for the delivery of the UKSPF government funding in Shropshire. Shropshire Council, as lead authority, retained the final approval and awarding contracts role. The Panel was Chaired by Jeannie McGillivray from the private sector.

5.2.2 The SEP Board was established to undertake the following duties:

- Provide a robust framework for ensuring that the EGS is implemented across partners, stakeholders, businesses and organisations and take collective ownership of the delivery of the EGS and Action Plan;
- Bring together partners and organisations to work collectively to develop, drive and own the strategy;
- Assume the role of the SEP Board for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), providing oversight for the delivery of this government funding in Shropshire as per the requirements for the administration of this fund set out by Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities; and
- Make recommendations to the Section 151 Officer of the Accountable body (i.e. Shropshire Council) in relation to how UKSPF and other agreed funding sources could be invested to support the delivery of the EGS and Shropshire Plan priorities.

5.2.3 Three Delivery Groups were established to support the design and planning of project Calls across the SEP Board's three themes, these being Place, Business and Skills. Each Group brought together Shropshire Council Officers and partner representatives to shape the focus, scope and timing of the Calls.

Once applications were received, they were assessed and scored by appointed independent appraisers, appraisers from partner organisations and Council Officers. An Appraisal Panel was then convened, comprised of individuals with no direct interest in the projects under review to ensure robust management of conflicts of interest (for example, a Business representative would appraise Community project applications). Following the Panel's review, the Delivery Groups considered the scores and submitted recommendations to the SEP Board for final endorsement.

5.2.4 Although the three Delivery Groups played an important early role, attendance was inconsistent and much of the work fell to the Technical Officers. Consequently, the Business and Place Groups were disbanded. The Skills Group, however, continued and broadened its membership, bringing in additional VSCE, HE and FE representatives, to support delivery of the Key Performance Indicators in the Shropshire EGS.

- 5.2.5 Jeannie McGillivray highlighted the breadth of the UKSPF and Rural Fund programme as one of the SEP Board's key successes, noting that support had reached community projects, businesses and initiatives strengthening employability and skills. The Chair felt the Programme had delivered tangible benefits to both service providers and the wider public. Oversight by the Board was described as transparent and inclusive, with representation from business, voluntary and public sector partners. The Chair also praised the UKSPF Programme Team, led by Gary Spence, for its professionalism, efficiency and fairness in administering funds:

'The process felt very transparent, clear and efficient. The UKSPF Team, with Gary Spence leading, worked extremely well'.

- 5.2.6 Towards the end of 2024/2025, the SEP Board began to lose momentum. While it had met regularly throughout most of the UKSPF Programme period, activity shifted increasingly to written procedures once UKSPF allocations had been confirmed. This approach still met Government requirements but it was felt by some members of the UKSPF Programme Team that it reduced opportunities for discussion and collective scrutiny.
- 5.2.7 Several Technical Officers reflected that the size of the SEP Board, around 37 members, made meaningful engagement challenging. Over the UKSPF delivery period attendance declined, email responses were limited and some Technical Officers felt the Board functioned more as a communications forum than an active decision-making body. Despite the large membership, the processes for managing conflicts of interest were reported as being clear, robust and consistently applied.
- 5.2.8 Administrative demands were also described as high, particularly given the number of interventions and the need to manage separate capital and revenue streams. Nevertheless, governance arrangements remained open and transparent and the SEP Board's role in endorsing decisions contributed to assurance and accountability. Despite the practical challenges identified, the overall delivery framework was effective and the Programme successfully met its spend requirements.

5.3 Programme Delivery Structure

- 5.3.1 All Projects were co-ordinated and managed by the UKSPF Programme Team, comprising the External Funding and Technical Lead Officer and three Technical Officers aligned to the Investment Priorities (Communities and Place, Supporting Local Business and People and Skills). The External Funding and Technical Lead Officer reported to the Service Manager for Economy, Funding and Skills.
- 5.3.2 The Programme Team was responsible for co-ordinating the open call process, supporting applicants, overseeing project delivery, administering change requests, undertaking monitoring and ensuring compliance with DLUHC/MHCLG requirements. Regular communication between the Technical Officers and delivery organisations was central to maintaining momentum and addressing emerging issues.

5.4 Finance and Legal Support

- 5.4.1 The Programme Team was supported by key corporate services, with financial oversight provided by the Strategic Financial Accountant within the Council's Financial Technical Accounting Team. This role covered budgeting, forecasting, monitoring and reporting to DLUHC/MHCLG, ensuring that claims and expenditure were accurately recorded and compliant with government requirements. Legal Services contributed to drafting and issuing grant funding agreements, as well as advising on contractual, procurement and compliance matters. Their input ensured that projects were delivered within statutory and regulatory frameworks and that risks were effectively managed.

- 5.4.2 Financial monitoring and reporting relied on a combination of UKSPF spreadsheets and internal systems. These had to account for multiple interventions, funding streams and revenue/capital allocations, which sometimes made tracking and reconciliation complex. Close collaboration between Finance and the Programme Team, particularly with designated Technical Officers, was essential to ensure that records were consistent and that quarterly claims could be reconciled and reported accurately. The Strategic Financial Accountant commented:

'It was difficult as we had to monitor against different interventions/capital/revenue/Rural fund/UKSPF. Some agreements covered so many different elements – it could get very complicated'.

- 5.4.3 The financial management systems were generally effective, but several challenges were reported. The volume of project and contract variations, particularly toward the end of 2024/25, created significant pressure on staff. Small grant schemes and community crowdfunding initiatives were particularly time-consuming relative to the resources available. The Strategic Financial Accountant highlighted the need for clear roles, dedicated finance staffing and sufficient lead-in time for reconciliation and approval to prevent delays.

'It is important in future we make sure staff resources are in place. Not replacing the Finance Officer who left the organisation was based on the assumption that the funds would end in March 2025, but there was another year'.

- 5.4.4 Effective delivery relied on good collaboration with Legal Services. Grant funding agreements were reviewed by both Legal and Finance to ensure eligibility, compliance and proper contractual arrangements. The Strategic Financial Accountant and Programme Team worked closely to establish reporting deadlines and reconcile claims, while Legal support was critical for contract variations and changes to project budgets. Interview feedback emphasised that timely input from Finance and Legal was essential for keeping projects on track, though staffing limitations and high volumes of variations sometimes caused delays. The Technical Lead Officer reported *'Any change to a project's budget meant we had to do a contract variation. Toward the end of 24/25 it got very bureaucratic with delays in having to get Legal to change contracts and Finance not providing their input until the contract was place'.*

- 5.4.5 Lessons from managing UKSPF and the Rural Fund finances include the importance of ensuring adequate staffing throughout the Programme, particularly in peak periods and for programmes extending beyond initial funding assumptions. Simplifying monitoring and reporting processes, providing clear guidance on tolerance thresholds and maintaining close collaboration between Finance, Legal and the Programme Team were identified as key enablers of smoother delivery. For future programmes, dedicated finance support and improved planning for end-of-year reconciliation would help balance administrative demands with programme delivery priorities.

'Internally it was very difficult. We had to strike a balance between being risk adverse and taking accountability'.

5.5 Staffing and Capacity Changes During Delivery

- 5.5.1 Midway through delivery, several staffing changes affected the Programme's supporting infrastructure. The Finance Officer who previously acted as the Programme Team's primary point of contact left her role and the position was not replaced. Responsibilities were transferred to the Strategic Financial Accountant, increasing workload and reducing capacity. As a result, financial checks and agreement reviews took longer to process. The Strategic Financial Accountant reported that *'it caused a bit of a transition time as I had to get to grips with the Programme and all of its projects'.*

5.5.2 Similarly, although a dedicated Legal Executive was appointed within Legal Services, their capacity was constrained by competing demands. As a result, the Legal Executive faced significant pressure at a time when the volume of funding agreements, claims and contract variations was at its highest.

5.5.3 Towards the end of 2024/25, the volume of contract variations increased significantly, coinciding with the budget-setting process for the following financial year. This created additional administrative pressure and extended processing times, compounded by capacity constraints within Finance during this particularly busy period in the financial cycle. Prior to March 2025, there were no tolerance thresholds in place, meaning all variations required formal approval through Finance. After March 2025, a 15% tolerance threshold was introduced, allowing changes below this level to be approved internally and helping to streamline the process.

Several Technical Officers reflected on these challenges:

‘Grant Funding Agreement then had to be prepared and signed off by Finance. This took 6-8 weeks. A lot of external projects didn’t want to start spending until they had their approval. It delayed spend. There were no tolerance thresholds in place. It all had to go through Finance’.

‘We had to keep moving money around, for example between different Priorities and also within Interventions. Claims and Legal Contracts had to keep changing. Some contracts etc were inconsistent. There were not enough staff in Legal Team to oversee everything. It took way too long’.

5.5.4 Although the experience of the staff involved in delivering the Programme brought clear benefits, some staff reflected that there were occasions where opportunities for closer joint working and shared learning could have been further developed, particularly in relation to the Legal and Finance Teams supporting Programme delivery. More widely, increased homeworking following COVID, combined with hot-desking and the absence of a permanent shared workspace, was seen by some as further reducing informal opportunities for collaboration and cross-programme alignment.

‘At times it was messy. We didn’t all do it together and went our own way. Working from home also didn’t help, we were working in silos a lot of the time. We often missed out on joining up opportunities’.

5.5.5 Technical Officers demonstrated competence and professionalism undertaking the delivery of their Investment Priorities but noted that the wider roles across the Team were not always clearly defined, which, at times, created confusion. Staff felt this stemmed from remote working, limited visibility of each other’s tasks, the urgency with which the Programme had to be delivered and the volume of work required.

‘There has not been enough time to work out roles and responsibilities, but it needs to be looked at before another Programme comes on board’.

5.5.6 Despite these challenges, staff remained committed to delivering the Programme. There is a sense of achievement amongst staff and appreciation of each other’s capabilities and the hard work that was undertaken up to 31 March 2025.

‘It wasn’t easy, but we stuck with it. Looking back, there’s a real sense of achievement across the team and genuine appreciation for how hard everyone has worked’.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund – Shropshire Council

5.5.7 Overall, while the Programme benefited from a highly capable and motivated team, future programmes would benefit from roles and responsibilities being clearly defined from the outset, with particular clarity around the remit of each role within the Team.

5.6 Delivery Across the Three Investment Priorities

5.6.1 The Technical Lead Officer managed the delivery of the UKSPF and Rural Fund Programmes, overseeing the Technical Officers responsible for Communities and Place, Supporting Local Business and People and Skills. In this role, the Lead Officer coordinated closely with internal teams, including Legal and Finance, to ensure robust governance, compliance and Programme assurance. The Lead Officer's responsibilities encompassed overall Programme oversight, reporting to the SEP Board, maintaining alignment with local strategies and priorities and guiding the operational work of the Technical Officers. The role evolved over time, expanding from initial oversight of Programme set-up, including recruitment of the Team and delivery structures, to broader responsibility for monitoring delivery, resolving challenges and maximising the impact of all the projects across the county. The Lead Officer also played a key role in fostering relationships with external partners and ensuring that the Programme supported Shropshire's strategic priorities.

5.6.2 Each of the three Technical Officers played a central role in shaping and delivering activity within their respective Investment Priority. Their responsibilities spanned the full Programme cycle, from designing Calls for projects and managing contracting to overseeing delivery, ensuring compliance and monitoring outcomes. This required close liaison with delivery partners, troubleshooting issues, coordination of reporting to DLUHC/MHCLG and ensuring projects remained aligned with local needs. As one officer described, *'we had to build everything from scratch'*, reflecting the breadth and complexity of responsibilities under UKSPF.

An overview of delivery for each of the Investment Priorities is provided below.

5.6.3 Communities and Place – Delivery

(i) The Communities and Place portfolio was shaped through multiple Calls for projects in 2023, including a dedicated Rural Fund Call. The Communities and Place Technical Officer led the commissioning and allocation of funding across both UKSPF and the Rural Fund, managing a complex mix of capital and revenue streams. Her role spanned appraisal, contract preparation, claims management and later significant in-year adjustments to ensure funding was fully committed and spent. Toward the end of the Programme, this required intensive reallocation work, including transferring £400,000 of capital to revenue and tracking delivery separately for the Main UKSPF Programme and the Rural Fund.

'It was really busy across the different Calls, but the process itself worked well — projects were treated fairly and consistently'.

(ii) The resulting portfolio consisted of 28 projects spanning five interventions, these being green spaces, culture and heritage, active travel, capacity building/volunteering infrastructure and feasibility activity. The Technical Officer felt the mix of projects provided good geographic and thematic coverage, with applicants required to demonstrate clear need and demand. Most projects delivered successfully, though a small number of internal Shropshire Council-led projects did not progress, largely due to timescale, planning or procurement barriers.

'Capital was by far the most time-consuming — the checks, the evidence, the follow-up queries. It all added pressure'.

- (iii) Alignment with wider community activity was generally good, with examples of co-ordination to avoid duplication including Energize, who worked with the Crowdfunding Team. However, an initiative around High Street/Town Centre intervention proved the most challenging. Applicants struggled to secure match funding and obtain planning consent in time, with the late arrival of Rural Fund capital compressing delivery windows further. The Technical Officer emphasised that while alignment mechanisms were effective, regulatory timescales were a structural barrier.

'Planning held up a lot of projects. Even when the funding was there, they just couldn't get their consents through in time'.

- (v) Projects demonstrated substantial added value, though evidencing outcomes was more difficult. Claims processes required projects to report on outputs such as events, volunteer numbers and engagement metrics, which were straightforward to collect. However, assessing outcomes such as improved wellbeing, community cohesion or preventative benefits was far more challenging within the Programme timeframe, especially as many capital projects completed only in March 2025. Nevertheless, the Technical Officer highlighted several high-impact examples, such as the Ludlow Community Café, improvements to canal towpaths and infrastructure that supported preventative work with vulnerable groups.

'There were some lovely examples of how the funding supported preventative work, especially with vulnerable people....The Ludlow Community Café was a great example of something with real community benefit'.

- (vi) Capital projects enabled significant physical improvements that would not otherwise have been possible, particularly through the Rural Fund. The Technical Officer noted examples where small investments unlocked much wider social or health benefits, for instance, enhanced park accessibility for families and wheelchair users or heritage improvements at Cambrian Railway Station. She also observed meaningful alignment with People and Skills projects, with cross-programme outcomes emerging in areas such as youth engagement and anti-social behaviour.

'A lot of the capital only finished in March, so the longer-term benefits will only be realised later'.

- (vii) Delivery challenges were most pronounced around capital, which required extensive checks, regulatory compliance and follow-up queries. Time pressure was a recurring issue: late funding announcements, planning delays, procurement requirements and the sequencing of approvals left limited delivery time, especially for capital schemes. Match funding was also a constraint which was initially set at 30%. It hindered good-quality projects. Reducing match to 10% at year-end helped unblock delivery. The Technical Officer recommended more flexible match expectations in future programmes.

'Towards the end it became a juggling act — especially separating the Rural Fund from the main UKSPF allocation'.

- (viii) Project management and commissioning processes were viewed as transparent, fair and auditable. Weighted scoring sheets and clear thresholds ensured consistency, with no applicants challenging any funding decision. While early use of Sub-Groups under the SEP Board created complications due to lack of member involvement, switching to written procedures streamlined the process. However, delays in finalising grant agreements,

linked to internal processes, caused hesitancy among external applicants to begin delivery and created pressure near year-end.

- (ix) Communication with delivery partners was generally positive, although the breadth of project types made collective engagement difficult. As a result, the Technical Officer met with projects individually. This approach provided tailored support but was resource-intensive. To encourage collaboration across the Investment Priorities, the Technical Officers for Business and Skills were involved in discussions whenever relevant to ensure projects were aligned and well connected.

‘Because the projects were so different, meeting people individually worked best — but it was very time-intensive’.

Communication challenges were most evident with Parish Councils, many of whom became aware of opportunities too late due to reliance on hearing about the programme through intermediary networks rather than direct communication.

- (x) Reflecting on the Programme, the Technical Officer’s key lessons emphasise the need for planning and regulatory consents to be secured prior to contracting, clearer role definitions during delivery and simplicity in funding conditions such as match requirements. She also highlighted the importance of strategic outreach, noting that while multiple channels were used, including the Invest platform, community networks and LinkedIn, engagement was uneven across sectors. Future Programmes would benefit from more structured and targeted communication, longer lead-in times and clearer responsibilities across the delivery team.

5.6.4 Supporting Local Business – Delivery

- (i) The Technical Officer for Supporting Local Business managed the full end-to-end lifecycle for both revenue and capital programmes, delivering Calls in April and September 2023, overseeing contracting and ensuring compliance. The early workload was amplified by tight timescales and the need to develop processes in real time. Despite this, her background in ERDF/ESF helped the Programme mobilise quickly, with efficient systems put in place to support delivery partners and applicants.
- (ii) The Technical Officer observed that the combination of Main UKSPF Programme revenue projects and Rural Fund capital grants created a well-balanced portfolio that supported businesses at different stages and across Shropshire. Although delivery appeared seamless from an applicant’s perspective, internally it was far more complex. In particular, the eight Supporting Local Business Interventions were described as unwieldy, requiring frequent budget adjustments to keep delivery on track.

‘To the businesses it looked like one Programme but behind the scenes it was completely separate, with different reporting to DLUHC/MHCLG’.

- (iii) There was good alignment with wider business support provision and the Technical Officer emphasised that pre-contracting discussions were important in avoiding duplication. The projects provided good geographic coverage and cross-referrals worked well, supported by regular meetings and the countywide Expo event. The only area not progressed was the Social Enterprise intervention, where proposals overlapped with existing activity.

‘We ironed everything out up front and made sure nobody was competing with each other’.

- (iv) The Technical Officer believed the Programme added clear value to Shropshire’s business community, with a number of projects demonstrating high demand and tangible outcomes, highlighting Aston University’s rapid prototyping support as an example, noting it had a waiting list of businesses. Capital grants enabled investment that would not otherwise have happened, however they did create administrative burden, especially the small value grants. The absence of match funding helped pace of delivery but required thorough checks against double-funding.
- (v) In terms of delivery, the Technical Officer felt the Programme worked well where experienced staff, transparent commissioning and collaborative working were in place. However, internal processes sometimes created delays and the Technical Officer also questioned whether more delivery could have been delegated, particularly to the Growth Hub, which felt *‘would have saved so much work’* and offered valuable business insight.
- (vi) Funding levels were generally appropriate, but the compressed timeframe created significant pressure. With DLUHC contracting only finalised in December 2022, *‘we basically lost the first year’*, which forced rapid mobilisation and repeated budget reallocations. While the Team responded quickly, the Officer noted that *‘it makes much more sense to have a five-year programme’* to reflect the scale of work required to establish and coordinate delivery effectively.
- (vii) Looking ahead, several improvements for future programmes were identified. These included simplifying interventions; reviewing overhead rates to ensure the most effective use of public funding; strengthening controls to ensure funding is appropriately targeted and does not substitute for posts that could reasonably be resourced within large organisations and reducing reliance on Open Calls by commissioning established delivery partners directly.

The Technical Officer emphasised the value of experienced staff being allocated to deliver specific Investment Priorities, however emphasised the disproportionate administrative effort given the short delivery window.

‘The allocation of staff to each of the Priority Areas worked well. We all knew our areas inside out...however, it was a lot of effort for such a short programme. It would make so much sense to have a longer programme, 5 years plus’.

5.6.5 People and Skills – Delivery

- (i) The People and Skills Technical Officer managed the end-to-end delivery, from designing Calls for projects to assessing applications, awarding funding and monitoring outcomes. The Technical Officer facilitated the Skills Delivery Group and engaged closely with the SEP Board, local employers, training providers and community organisations, ensuring that interventions addressed local skills gaps and supported inclusive growth. The Technical Officer noted that managing multiple projects simultaneously required careful coordination, particularly in light of the Delta procurement system and conflict-of-interest management.

‘If I were to do it now I would just do it as Calls. When going through Delta you have a deadline and they are all in on that day. There’s a lot of work to do all in one go. Having it as a Call process I could start looking at submissions as and when they came in and spread the workload’.

- (ii) The People and Skills projects were designed to provide a balanced mix of support, including supported employment, digital skills and upskilling for both employed and economically inactive individuals. The Technical Officer stressed that activities were

informed by data and stakeholder consultation to meet local needs, though she noted that delays in project start dates and short funding windows limited impact. Despite these constraints, the programmes addressed foundational skills, vocational training and inclusion, supporting NEETs, older workers and people with disabilities.

- (iii) Alignment with wider provision was largely positive, with projects complementing existing Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) programmes and European Social Fund (ESF) legacy provision. Delivery partners, such as Enable and Shrewsbury Town FC Foundation, brought extensive experience, helping to avoid duplication. The Technical Officer highlighted some challenges, including inconsistent engagement from FE colleges and early confusion among Job Centre Plus work coaches, which was resolved through direct involvement in project groups. Overall, collaboration through the Skills Delivery Group and SEP Board helped maintain coherence across the local skills ecosystem.
- (iv) People and Skills projects added value by filling gaps in mainstream provision. Without UKSPF funding, supported employment, digital skills and upskilling interventions would not have been available locally. The Technical Officer emphasised that participants gained confidence, social connections and improved mental health, with projects targeting those furthest from the labour market. Interventions integrated wraparound support such as mental health guidance, childcare, transport and digital inclusion, which are rarely funded through other programmes, providing additional social and economic benefits.

'Projects have reached individuals who are often underserved by mainstream employment and skills programmes, such as those furthest from the labour market, people with complex barriers and those in rural or deprived areas. By offering bespoke support, they've helped participants build confidence, gain qualifications and move closer to employment'.

- (v) Project delivery was underpinned by collaborative working, with regular meetings facilitating referrals and problem-solving across projects. The Technical Officer highlighted successes including high engagement levels, tangible job outcomes, formal qualifications and improved employability skills. She noted significant results from School of Coding, Brightstar Boxing and sport-based learning initiatives, with beneficiaries describing support as *'life-changing'*. However, short-term funding cycles, multi-agency support needs and constrained employer engagement were persistent challenges.
- (vi) The level of funding and compressed delivery timeframe limited the potential impact of People and Skills interventions. Working with individuals furthest from the labour market required intensive, long-term support, making six-month sustained employment targets challenging to achieve. While digital skills and upskilling projects overachieved on outputs, overall, the Technical Officer felt that increased investment and a longer programme window could have enabled broader impact and better outcomes for vulnerable and rural populations. The Technical Officer felt so much more could have been achieved, highlighting that the Digital Skills project had a waiting listing of over 250 people.

'Short-term funding cycles made it difficult to offer ongoing support or track long-term outcomes, particularly for individuals with complex barriers'.

'The School of Coding had a waiting list of over 250 individuals. The Programme's impact could have been significantly increased with more investment and extended delivery'.

- (vii) The Technical Officer identified lessons for future People and Skills programmes, including rationalising governance structures, streamlining SEP Board engagement, building tolerance levels into programme design and improving employer engagement. Co-ordinated Call-based funding approaches in future would help to spread workload and

reduce pressure, ensuring longer delivery periods for supported employment and strengthening collaboration with community and business support initiatives.

5.7 Public Sector Equality Duty

5.7.1 Shropshire Council adheres to the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) as set out in the Equality Act 2010, ensuring that its policies, decisions and Programmes, including UKSPF, take full account of the needs of people with protected characteristics.

The Council's approach is underpinned by the three core aims of the Duty:

- Eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Advancing equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- Fostering good relations between people from different backgrounds to promote understanding and inclusion.

Through this approach, Shropshire Council sought to ensure that UKSPF-funded activity not only met statutory equality requirements but also contributed to wider ambitions around fairness, accessibility and inclusive growth across the county.

5.7.2 At the project level, all organisations receiving UKSPF funding were required to demonstrate how equality and diversity considerations were embedded in their delivery, including the assurance that services were accessible, barriers faced by under-represented groups were addressed and proactive engagement with diverse communities across Shropshire took place.

These measures reflect the Council's commitment to promoting equality and inclusion throughout the design, commissioning and implementation of its UKSPF Programme.

5.8 Management and Delivery - Lessons Learned

5.8.1 Overall, management and delivery arrangements were effective and enabled the Programme to remain compliant, well-governed and responsive to local needs despite significant time pressures and complexity. Set out below are the key lessons learned:

- (i) Compressed Programme timescales place significant pressure on delivery structures and require early mobilisation, stable resourcing and clearly defined roles to function effectively. Staff commitment and prior experience of external funding were critical success factors, highlighting the importance of early appointment, continuity and sufficient capacity throughout the Programme lifecycle.
- (ii) Clear allocation of responsibility supported effective delivery. Assigning dedicated Technical Officers to each Investment Priority enabled focused oversight, better relationships with delivery partners and better alignment of activity within thematic areas. Looking ahead, incorporating a cross-cutting coordination function within existing structures would further strengthen future programmes by improving integration across Project Calls, aligning themes and interventions and supporting collaboration, referrals and partnership working between delivery partners.
- (iii) Robust governance and compliance systems were essential in managing risk across a complex funding landscape. The involvement of Legal and Finance teams with external funding experience ensured effective controls around subsidy control, contracting and grant management. However, capacity constraints at peak periods created bottlenecks, demonstrating the need for flexible resourcing and contingency planning in these teams to maintain momentum.
- (iv) Programme scale and governance structures influenced effectiveness. Large boards and sub-groups supported accountability but limited meaningful engagement and agile

decision-making. Smaller, more focused groups would enable more meaningful challenge, clearer direction and more active participation while maintaining appropriate oversight.

- (v) Remote and distributed working practices, combined with fewer opportunities for informal interaction, limited collaboration across teams, including between delivery and support functions such as Legal and Finance. Future programmes would benefit from more structured opportunities for cross-team engagement, clearer definition of roles and interfaces and regular in-person meetings to support coordination, consistency and shared learning across large, multi-priority programmes.
- (vi) Built-in flexibility within management arrangements improved delivery efficiency. The early introduction of tolerance thresholds for minor changes reduced administrative burden and avoided unnecessary delays, reinforcing the value of proportionate change-control mechanisms in grant-funded programmes.
- (vii) Capital delivery is particularly sensitive to planning, procurement and regulatory requirements. Supply-chain constraints and approval processes limited delivery flexibility, reinforcing the need for longer lead-in times, realistic delivery schedules and early risk identification for capital-intensive interventions.
- (viii) Short programme durations limit the ability to embed systems, build partnerships and maximise impact. A multi-year funding model would support more strategic planning, smoother mobilisation and more sustainable delivery, enabling management structures and partnerships to mature over time.

Management and Delivery: Summary

The Shropshire UKSPF Investment Programme was delivered through a structured governance and operational framework, overseen by the Shropshire Economic Partnership (SEP) Board, which included public, private, education and voluntary sector representatives. The Board provided strategic oversight, ensuring alignment with the Economic Growth Strategy 2022–27, while Shropshire Council retained final approval and contracting authority. Three Delivery Groups initially supported project Calls across the Investment Priorities: Communities and Place; Supporting Local Business and People and Skills. The Business and Place Groups were later disbanded due to inconsistent attendance, leaving the Skills Group to continue with broader representation.

Programme delivery was coordinated by an experienced and capable UKSPF Programme Team, led by the External Funding and Technical Lead Officer and supported by three Technical Officers, alongside Finance and Legal Services. The Team managed Calls, appraisals, contracting, monitoring, compliance and reporting to DLUHC/MHCLG. Despite compressed timescales, complex capital and revenue streams and high administrative demands, the Programme successfully met spend requirements and delivered tangible outcomes across all Investment Priorities, including accessible support that complemented and reinforced national and local strategies.

The Programme also highlighted practical lessons for future delivery. Clear role definitions, early mobilisation, dedicated staffing, proportionate change-control mechanisms and integrated cross-team coordination were critical to maintaining momentum and managing risk. Longer programme durations, smaller governance groups and realistic timelines for capital-intensive projects would further enhance efficiency and impact. Overall, the Programme demonstrated effective management, robust governance and adaptability, delivering meaningful benefits to communities, businesses and skills development while promoting equality, inclusion and local strategic priorities.

6.0 Value for Money

6.1 Value for Money – Introduction

6.1.1 This section provides a light-touch assessment of Value for Money (VfM) for the Shropshire UKSPF Programme, structured around the four core dimensions of Economy, Efficiency, Effectiveness and Equity. The assessment draws on Programme expenditure data, delivery evidence, output and outcome performance, Programme documentation and feedback from delivery organisations. It is intended to be proportionate, recognising the complexity of the Programme, the one-to-many delivery model adopted across priorities and the relatively short delivery timescales associated with UKSPF.

The VfM assessment is presented for each of the three UKSPF Investment Priorities: Communities and Place; Supporting Local Business and People and Skills.

6.1.2 Across the Main UKSPF Programme and the Rural Fund, the combined target expenditure by 31 March 2025 was £13,434,720. Despite a delayed Programme start and compressed delivery period, total actual expenditure reached £12,141,723.28, representing 90.4% of the overall allocation. This reflects a credible level of financial performance given the scale and complexity of delivery across multiple Investment Priorities and funding streams.

6.2 Communities and Place

6.2.1 Economy

A combined total of £5,049,606.96 (Main UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund, excluding Management and Admin) was allocated to Communities and Place interventions. By 31 March 2025, actual expenditure totalled £4,684,434.81, representing 92.8% of the available allocation. This high level of spend demonstrates effective financial management and the ability to mobilise and deliver activity within a constrained timeframe.

In addition, the Investment Priority secured £939,199.73 (£137,391.24 revenue and £801,808.49 capital) in match funding from third-party sources, including Shropshire Council, private sources and other UK Government funding programmes. This additional investment enhanced the overall value of the Programme by increasing leverage, enabling a greater scale and quality of place-based interventions and reinforcing the longer-term economic and community benefits resulting from the funded activity.

Funding was awarded through competitive Calls for Proposals aligned to the approved UKSPF Investment Plan, the Shropshire Plan and the Economic Growth Strategy. Calls were targeted at intermediary and locally embedded organisations capable of delivering support at scale, using a one-to-many model to maximise reach and impact.

Economy was supported through the use of established intermediary organisations with local knowledge and proven delivery capacity, reducing mobilisation costs and enabling activity to commence quickly. Delivery focused on enhancing existing community assets and infrastructure, rather than creating wholly new provision, supporting economy through scale, consistency and efficient use of resources. Clear intervention-level allocations ensured that funding was targeted towards priority themes, including town centres, cultural and heritage assets, community capacity building and rural infrastructure, allowing investment to be focused on areas of highest need and potential impact.

6.2.2 Efficiency

Efficiency was supported through the use of grant-based and programme delivery models that enabled funding to reach multiple communities and beneficiaries within a constrained delivery

period. Interventions focused on improving existing assets and infrastructure, rather than creating wholly new provision, helping to maximise the return on investment.

Projects were required to demonstrate clear community impact and alignment with local strategies at application stage. The emphasis on intermediary delivery reduced administrative overheads for the Council while enabling local organisations to tailor delivery to place-specific needs. Capital-only rural funding was targeted at settlements below defined population thresholds, ensuring that resources were focused on areas where alternative funding sources are more limited.

The scale of delivery relative to funding indicates efficient use of resources, particularly where projects generated multiple benefits across wellbeing, participation, social cohesion and use of community assets.

6.2.3 Effectiveness

Evidence from delivery organisations suggests clear additionality and effectiveness. All respondents to the Communities and Place survey reported that they would not have been able to progress their projects without UKSPF support, indicating very low deadweight and a high degree of additionality.

Beyond delivery of core outputs, projects generated wider and often unanticipated benefits, including strengthened local partnerships, increased community participation, improved wellbeing and social inclusion, enhanced organisational capacity and attraction of additional funding. These outcomes reinforce the effectiveness of the Priority in delivering change that extends beyond the immediate scope of funded activity.

Capital investment through the Rural Fund complemented this activity by creating lasting environmental and active travel assets, providing a foundation for longer-term community benefits. While some outcome measures, such as increased footfall or usage, had not yet been fully realised by March 2025, this reflects the longer timescales associated with capital investment rather than weaknesses in programme design or delivery.

Overall, the evidence indicates that expenditure under this Priority has contributed effectively to improving local places and enhancing community infrastructure across Shropshire.

6.2.4 Equity

Projects within the Communities and Place Investment Priority targeted community-level activity and were designed to address spatial and social inequalities across Shropshire. Delivery focused in particular on rural towns, villages and hamlets (with Shrewsbury excluded from the Rural Fund) market towns acting as service hubs for surrounding rural areas and communities experiencing barriers to accessing services, facilities or cultural opportunities. This place-based targeting ensured that investment was directed towards areas less likely to benefit from market-led regeneration, supporting the equity and additionality of public funding.

Equality and inclusion considerations were embedded across funded activity, with projects required to demonstrate accessibility and promote participation across protected characteristics, including those with disabilities. The nature and scale of outputs achieved provide supporting evidence of this inclusive approach. For example, substantial investment in cultural, heritage and creative activity supported wide community engagement, with 688 local events and activities delivered under local arts and culture interventions and over 1,300 recorded engagements.

In addition, alignment with the Council's Social Value Framework reinforced inclusive outcomes. Projects promoted employment and skills development for local people, including

priority groups such as care leavers and people with disabilities, encouraged local supply chain spending, offered apprenticeships and workplace training and supported sustainable practices such as reducing carbon impact and waste. By embedding Social Value alongside equity, Communities and Place interventions delivered both inclusive access and broader social, economic and environmental benefits.

6.3 Supporting Local Business

6.3.1 Economy

A total of £6,333,457.79 was allocated to Supporting Local Business interventions across the Main UKSPF Programme and the Rural Fund, excluding Management and Admin. Actual expenditure reached £5,437,115.63 by 31 March 2025, representing 85.8% of the available allocation. While this level of spend was lower than that achieved under other Investment Priorities, it reflects the inherent challenges of delivering business grant and capital investment schemes within a compressed delivery timeframe and during a period of economic volatility.

The Investment Priority also secured £1,130,048.27 in capital match funding from third party sources including Shropshire Council, private sources other government funded programmes. This significantly increased the overall value of the Programme and enhanced its leverage and impact by enabling a greater scale of business investment than could have been achieved through UKSPF resources alone.

Economy was supported through the use of established delivery partners, in-house expertise and existing business networks, reducing set-up costs and enabling delivery to commence quickly. Funding focused on intermediary-led delivery of business support and grant schemes, rather than direct one-off grants to individual businesses, supporting economy through scale and consistency. The combination of advisory support, grant funding and capital investment allowed resources to be targeted at areas of highest demand and potential impact.

The Supporting Local Business interventions have made a clear contribution to local economic growth, with 192 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs created as a direct result of Programme activity to date. GVA per employee is calculated using 2023 ONS data for filled jobs (smoothed) in the Programme area. The GVA average per filled job in Shropshire is £49,136².

Estimates of gross economic impacts (jobs created and GVA) are detailed below:

- GVA per employee: £49,136
- GVA (per annum) estimated from gross jobs created (192): £9,434,112
- GVA over a 3-year return period: £28,302,336

These economic outcomes align closely with the priorities set out in Shropshire's *Economic Growth Strategy (2022–2027)* which provides a strategic framework for supporting business growth, innovation and skills development across the county. The employment impacts achieved through the Programme reflect both the immediate benefits of job creation and the longer-term potential for supported businesses to generate sustained local economic value. In this context, the Programme's performance demonstrates close alignment with Shropshire's ambitions for resilient, inclusive and innovation-led growth.

2

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/labourproductivity/datasets/subregionalproductivitylabourproductivitygvaaperhourworkedandgvaaperfilledjobindicesbyuknuts2andnuts3subregions>

6.3.2 Efficiency

The Supporting Local Business Priority delivered extensive enterprise engagement, non-financial support and grant activity across a wide range of interventions. Monitoring data shows that business participation and advisory outputs frequently exceeded targets, indicating that delivery mechanisms were efficient in reaching and engaging local firms.

Delivery through a mix of in-house provision and contracted partners supported coordination and reduced duplication, while the Rural Fund capital grants achieved high take-up among rural businesses. Although some employment and grant-related outputs remain below target, this reflects the longer lead times associated with business investment decisions rather than inefficiencies in delivery. Overall, the evidence suggests that available resources were used efficiently to maximise business reach and early productivity gains.

6.3.3 Effectiveness

The Supporting Local Business Investment Priority has been effective in building business capability, supporting innovation and stimulating early employment growth. Several interventions exceeded targets for business engagement, technology adoption and enterprise support, demonstrating close alignment between programme design and business needs.

Early evidence of job creation, productivity improvements and adoption of new technologies indicates that UKSPF funding has contributed positively to local economic outcomes. While some impacts are still emerging, particularly for capital-supported businesses, the level of engagement achieved and the nature of early outcomes suggest that further benefits are likely to accrue beyond the end of the Programme.

Survey evidence indicates high additionality. 77% of respondents stated they would not have been able to progress without UKSPF support, while the remainder reported that activity would have progressed more slowly. On this basis, the Programme can reasonably be assumed to have delivered full additionality by accelerating and enabling business growth that would otherwise not have occurred within the same timeframe.

Additional benefits reported by delivers included enhanced business networks, raised profiles, additional funding secured and improved relationships with local authorities, reinforcing the effectiveness of the Priority beyond core outputs.

6.3.4 Equity

While the Supporting Local Business Investment Priority in Shropshire was not explicitly targeted at specific under-represented groups, the Programme was designed as a universal, intermediary-led offer intended to support a wide cross-section of the local business base. By focusing on one-to-many delivery through business support organisations, networks and partnerships, the Programme aimed to maximise reach across sectors and geographies, including rural and market town economies. This approach helped reduce barriers associated with awareness, capacity and access to support, particularly for smaller firms and micro-businesses less likely to engage directly with public funding opportunities.

Evidence from delivery indicates that this model supported broad participation across the business community. For example, 1,391 enterprises accessed non-financial support across several interventions, including innovation and R&D support, decarbonisation activity and wider employment growth measures, with associated outcomes such as the adoption of new technologies and the creation of full-time equivalent jobs. In addition, the Rural Fund provided targeted capital grant support to micro and small enterprises in rural areas, contributing to job creation and business modernisation in locations where access to alternative finance is more limited.

Equity within Supporting Local Business was further supported through targeted projects addressing barriers faced by under-represented groups. The *Enable* project supported Shropshire employers to improve disability confidence, enhance equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) practices and achieve DDA compliance. The *Silverpreneurs*[®] project focused on individuals aged 50+, helping them pursue entrepreneurship beyond corporate careers and broadening access for an often under-represented age group. These initiatives, alongside alignment with the Council's Social Value Framework, demonstrate good practice in embedding equity. Future programmes could build on this approach by proactively engaging under-represented participants to ensure support reaches those facing additional barriers.

6.4 People and Skills

6.4.1 Economy

The People and Skills Investment Priority was allocated £1,617,846.57 from the Main UKSPF Programme, excluding Management and Admin, of which £1,586,364.16 was spent by 31 March 2025, representing 98% of the available budget. This very high level of expenditure reflects ongoing demand for skills and employability support and effective financial management across delivery partners.

Funding was awarded competitively to intermediary organisations delivering skills, employment and inclusion activity aligned to local needs identified in the Marches Local Skills Report. The use of existing training infrastructure, delivery partnerships and flexible provision models enabled a wide range of support to be delivered without significant additional overheads and ensured that funding was focused primarily on frontline delivery.

Delivery partners, including Enable, Shrewsbury Town FC Foundation the School of Coding and Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, leveraged existing infrastructure and networks to provide tailored interventions. Using proven providers with prior experience in ESF and DWP programmes enabled rapid mobilisation of support without the costs associated with establishing new delivery channels. The Programme explicitly avoided duplication of mainstream services, focusing on groups not fully supported elsewhere, including economically inactive adults, those with complex barriers and individuals in rural or underserved areas.

Projects also contributed to upstream social and economic benefits, including reducing reliance on statutory services such as adult social care. By improving employability, confidence and independence, participants were less likely to require low-level support or early intervention from public services, representing cost avoidance for local authority budgets.

6.4.2 Efficiency

In total 1,383 people engaged with the employment and skills interventions, with participation levels and qualification outputs exceeding targets across several delivery strands. Delivery partners demonstrated flexibility in responding to local labour market needs and participant demand, optimising available resources to maximise outputs and reach priority groups.

While some longer-term outcome indicators, such as sustained employment, remain below target at this stage, this is consistent with the time typically required for participants to progress from training and employability support into durable labour market outcomes. This suggests that performance against these indicators should continue to improve as cohorts complete their interventions and move further along the employment pathway.

A notable example of efficiency and added value was the close working between People and Skills supported employment projects and the Integrated Care Board. This ensured alignment with the Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin Integrated Care Strategy and helped position supported employment activity alongside existing local services. As a result, individuals who

were out of work due to health-related barriers were better supported to move onto an employment pathway. The Technical Officer reported that relationships between these organisations developed positively over the course of the Programme, with clearer and more effective referral pathways, including into the Connect to Work programme.

Collaboration between delivery partners was a core feature of the People and Skills theme. Bimonthly project meetings provided a forum to discuss delivery barriers, share good practice and facilitate referrals between projects. This enabled participants to access multiple interventions in a coordinated way, reducing duplication and optimising the use of limited resources. Despite lower levels of funding compared to other UKSPF themes, participation exceeded expectations, particularly in digital inclusion, vocational qualifications and upskilling activity.

6.4.3 Effectiveness

The People and Skills Investment Priority has been effective in supporting residents to improve their employability, digital skills and workforce progression. The People and Skills survey demonstrated meaningful changes in participants' skills, wellbeing and social engagement, with delivery organisations reporting that some beneficiaries described the support as 'life-changing'.

The Programme's effectiveness was enhanced by tailoring support to the needs of individuals. For those requiring intensive support, including people with substance misuse histories or those experiencing social isolation, the flexible and holistic interventions enabled progress that would not have been achievable through mainstream provision.

Survey and interview evidence indicates high additionality with two out of the three delivery organisations who responded to the survey, reporting that outcomes would not have been achieved, or would have been delayed, without UKSPF funding.

6.4.4 Equity

Equity was embedded in the People and Skills theme, prioritising support for economically inactive residents and those facing structural barriers to participation, including people with disabilities, individuals with health-related conditions, older workers, NEETs and residents in rural areas. The delivery organisations focused on improving access for groups less likely to engage with mainstream provision, reducing barriers linked to confidence, transport and digital exclusion. The focus on wrap-around employment support and essential digital skills reflected inequalities identified in the Shropshire Plan, Marches Local Skills Report and Economic Growth Strategy, supporting more inclusive access to skills and employability support across Shropshire. As demonstrated in the outputs and outcomes 691 socially excluded individuals accessed support and 575 people were supported to gain employment, exceeding the original target.

Equity was also reinforced through alignment with the Council's Social Value Framework, which encouraged providers to prioritise inclusive employment practices, support workforce wellbeing and promote opportunities in sectors with high local demand, such as care. This helped ensure that skills activity was not only accessible, but also relevant to participants facing multiple disadvantages and to sectors offering realistic progression routes. The Programme's emphasis on collaboration with partners such as the DWP, health services and local delivery organisations further supported equitable access by enabling referrals between services and tailoring support to individual needs.

6.5 Overall Conclusions

6.5.1 The Programme effectively combined competitive commissioning, use of established delivery partners and intermediary-led approaches to maximise reach and impact while controlling

costs. The additional investment, leveraged through match funding, enhanced the scale of the Programme and the outcomes achieved. Importantly, the UKSPF Programme Team worked hard to ensure VfM, providing cost and administrative efficiencies while maintaining a flexible, high-quality approach. This enabled the successful delivery of a complex Programme despite economic challenges including a change of government during the implementation period.

Collectively, these factors indicate that the Programme provided excellent VfM, achieving significant impact while optimising resources.

6.6 Value for Money - Lessons learned

6.6.1 Overall, the Programme achieved a credible level of Value for Money despite compressed delivery timescales and external economic pressures. The VfM assessment highlights the following key lessons for future programmes:

- (i) Partnering with established local organisations with existing infrastructure, networks and external funding experience reduced set-up costs, enabled rapid delivery and maximised the proportion of funding reaching frontline activity. This approach should continue to underpin future programmes.
- (ii) Compressed timescales limited the ability to fully realise outcomes, particularly for capital investment, business growth and skills progression. While the overall duration of programme delivery is not always in the control of the managing authority, multi-year programmes would allow interventions to mature, improve outcome realisation and better reflect the time needed for behavioural and economic change.
- (iii) The Programme successfully attracted third-party match funding and generated wider social, economic and environmental benefits beyond core outputs. Embedding social value and flexible match funding expectations at programme design stage can further enhance VfM by increasing leverage, sustainability and long-term impact.

Value-for-Money: Summary

The Shropshire UKSPF Programme delivered a credible level of Value for Money despite compressed delivery timescales and external economic pressures. Across the three Investment Priorities, the Programme combined competitive commissioning, intermediary-led delivery and use of established local partners to maximise reach and impact while controlling costs. Partners' existing infrastructure, networks and delivery experience reduced mobilisation costs and enabled a high proportion of funding to reach frontline activity quickly.

Total expenditure across the Main UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund reached over 90% of allocations, reflecting effective financial management and rapid mobilisation under a challenging timeframe. In addition, the Programme successfully secured significant third-party match funding, including private sources, Shropshire Council and other government funding programmes, enhancing leverage and enabling a greater scale and quality of interventions than could have been achieved through UKSPF resources alone. This additional investment amplified social, economic and environmental benefits, supporting local businesses, communities and skills development.

Efficiency was achieved through intermediary delivery models, coordination between partners and focus on enhancing existing assets rather than creating wholly new provision. Effectiveness is demonstrated through high additionality, outcomes exceeding expectations in business support, community participation and skills and employment development and the creation of full-time equivalent jobs contributing to local economic growth. Equity was embedded across the Programme, with targeted support for rural areas, underserved communities and under-represented groups, alongside alignment with the Council's Social Value Framework.

Overall, the evidence indicates that the Programme optimised resources, maximised impact and delivered significant Value for Money for Shropshire.

7. Conclusions

7.1 Conclusions - Introduction

This final section of the Evaluation presents the main findings and sets out considerations for future programme design and delivery. Key lessons learned have been integrated throughout the Evaluation, covering aspects such as relevance, performance, impact, management and delivery and value for money.

7.2 Main Findings

Relevance and Strategic Fit

- (i) The Shropshire UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund were highly relevant to local needs and well aligned with both national UKSPF priorities and local strategic objectives. The Programme responded appropriately to Shropshire's distinctive challenges, including an ageing and dispersed population, low productivity, workforce shortages, limited connectivity and rural isolation, which were particularly acute across market towns and rural communities and exacerbated by environmental risk and economic uncertainty.
- (ii) Overall, the Programme demonstrated a high degree of strategic coherence. By combining Communities and Place, Supporting Local Business, People and Skills and Rural Fund interventions within a place-based framework, it effectively balanced short-term delivery priorities with longer-term ambitions to strengthen community assets, support business diversification and grow the green and visitor economies. Without UKSPF investment, Shropshire Council would not have been able to support a number of important activities that addressed identified gaps in provision and responded to emerging local needs. The use of robust local data and intelligence ensured that interventions were grounded in evidence and responsive to local context.
- (iii) While the Programme was well designed and strategically coherent, compressed delivery timescales limited the ability to plan and launch funding calls concurrently. This reduced opportunities for integration, cross-project collaboration and shared learning across Investment Priorities and placed additional pressure on delivery teams and partners.

Performance and Delivery Effectiveness

- (iv) Despite a delayed start and compressed delivery window, the Programme achieved a high level of financial and operational performance. Overall expenditure of over 90% across the Main UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund represents a significant achievement given the scale, complexity and late mobilisation of activity.
- (v) Output delivery was generally positive across all three Investment Priorities, with many interventions exceeding participation and engagement targets. While some outcome measures remain below target, this largely reflects the nature of capital investment and economic and labour market change, where impacts materialise over longer timescales. The evaluation highlights the importance of recognising intermediate outcomes achieved during delivery, particularly where final outcomes will not be fully realised until, or after, projects have concluded. Importantly, the Programme established a solid platform for continued benefits beyond the formal funding period.

Impact and Added Value

- (vi) The Programme delivered clear added value through locally managed, partnership-led delivery. Shropshire Council's open call approach supported transparency, fairness and geographic balance, while local oversight enabled funding to be aligned with emerging needs and mobilised at pace.

- (vii) Impact was most evident where projects were delivered by trusted local organisations with established networks and where interventions were well targeted and flexible. Across all Investment Priorities, the Programme generated meaningful short- and medium-term outcomes, including improved community capacity and pride in place, strengthened business resilience and innovation and improved employability, skills and confidence among participants. The evaluation also demonstrates that relatively small-scale projects can make a significant difference and generate disproportionate impact when well targeted. Many longer-term impacts are expected to continue to emerge beyond the Programme's end.

Management, Delivery and Value for Money

- (viii) The Programme benefited from an experienced Programme Team, established partnership working and robust programme management systems. These factors enabled rapid mobilisation once funding was confirmed and supported effective governance, compliance and delivery under challenging conditions. Clear roles and responsibilities within the Programme Team were essential to managing delivery and should be established prior to programme launch in future initiatives.
- (ix) Programme scale and governance arrangements influenced delivery effectiveness. While the use of boards and sub-groups supported accountability and assurance, their size and structure at times limited meaningful engagement and agile decision-making. Evidence suggests that smaller, more focused governance groups would have enabled clearer strategic direction, more effective challenge and more active participation, while still maintaining appropriate oversight.
- (x) The design of the Programme, including separate reporting requirements for the Main UKSPF Programme and the Rural Fund, multiple interventions across Investment Priorities and the distinction between capital and revenue funding, increased the complexity of delivery management, financial monitoring and the evidencing of outputs and outcomes. While delivery was effective, these structural constraints limited the Programme's ability to fully embed activity and maximise longer-term impact.
- (xi) Overall, the Programme delivered credible value for money. The use of established delivery partners, intermediary-led models and alignment with existing assets reduced mobilisation costs, maximised reach and generated additional social, economic and environmental benefits, reinforced by significant match funding and leverage. Greater flexibility in match funding requirements would have further supported delivery, particularly for smaller organisations and community-led projects.

7.3 Considerations for Future Programmes

7.3.1 Drawing on the evaluation's overarching findings, the following considerations should inform the design and delivery of future place-based funding programmes:

- (i) **Ensure continuity of funding and avoid gaps between programmes**
Sustaining funding over time, with minimal breaks between successive programmes, is critical to maintaining momentum, retaining high quality and experienced staff, safeguarding delivery capacity and ensuring continuity of provision for communities and businesses. Gaps in funding risk the loss of skilled personnel, institutional knowledge and trusted local relationships that are difficult and costly to rebuild.
- (ii) **Design programmes with sufficient duration to support impact realisation**
Future programmes would benefit from longer delivery periods, particularly for capital, skills and business growth interventions. While high levels of spend and output can be

achieved within compressed timescales, longer durations are critical to embedding delivery, evidencing outcomes and maximising long-term impact.

(iii) **Strengthen cross-priority integration and coordination**

While the Programme achieved effective delivery within individual Investment Priorities, future programmes should place greater emphasis on cross-cutting design. Concurrent or thematic Calls would support better alignment across different priority areas, alongside dedicated coordination capacity to address complex challenges such as workforce development, rural isolation, digital exclusion and net zero transition more holistically.

(iv) **Build in structured opportunities for collaboration and shared learning**

Time pressures limited opportunities for delivery partners to collaborate, share learning and align activity. Future programmes should include planned mechanisms for collaboration, referrals and peer learning to amplify impact, reduce duplication and strengthen sustainability beyond the funded period.

(v) **Plan explicitly for post-programme impact capture**

As many outcomes materialise after programme closure, future funding rounds should recognise interim progress, such as skills development, improved employability and early business change, as valid performance indicators, alongside proportionate post-completion monitoring.

Monitoring frameworks should also consistently capture indirect outcomes, particularly where activity reduces pressure on local budgets (for example, through social inclusion and employability support that improves wellbeing and reduces reliance on NHS and Adult Social Care services). Systems to evidence these wider impacts should be designed from the outset and aligned with local strategies such as the Economic Growth Strategy and the Shropshire Plan.

Where pilots or feasibility projects are funded, programmes should include clear mechanisms to embed learning and support scale-up to maximise long-term impact.

(vi) **Maintain the benefits of local management while ensuring proportionate administration and governance**

Local oversight and established partnerships were key strengths of the Programme and should be retained. Future programmes should continue to streamline processes, ensure adequate resourcing across delivery and support functions and apply clear and proportionate processes for approving variations to projects, budgets and delivery plans.

Governance arrangements should also be proportionate to programme scale, with smaller, more focused boards or decision-making groups used where possible to support meaningful engagement, timely challenge and agile decision-making, while maintaining appropriate accountability. In addition, future programmes should consider retaining some delivery functions in-house and directly commissioning activity with trusted partners, particularly where timescales are limited, to reduce pressure on delivery teams and accelerate mobilisation.

(vii) **Experience from the Shropshire UKSPF Programme highlights the importance of aligning national programme design with local partnership ambitions.**

Competitive funding arrangements, while effective in driving delivery pace, can reduce incentives for delivery partners to collaborate or share learning where organisations are competing for the same funding. Future programmes would benefit from balancing competition with mechanisms that promote coordination, collaboration and supporting

joined-up delivery, shared learning and cumulative impact across communities, sectors and investment priorities.

Conclusions: Summary

This Evaluation concludes that the Shropshire UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund were highly relevant to local needs and well aligned with national priorities and local strategic objectives. The Programme responded effectively to Shropshire’s distinctive challenges, including rural isolation, workforce shortages, low productivity and limited connectivity, through a coherent, place-based approach spanning Communities and Place, Supporting Local Business, People and Skills and the Rural Fund. Robust use of local data and intelligence ensured that interventions addressed identified gaps and emerging needs.

Despite a delayed start and compressed delivery timescales, the Programme achieved notable financial and operational performance, with over 90% expenditure across both funds and generally positive output delivery. Impact was most evident where projects were delivered by trusted local organisations and where interventions were targeted and flexible, generating meaningful short- and medium-term outcomes across communities, businesses and individuals. Many longer-term impacts are expected to continue to emerge beyond programme closure.

Locally managed, partnership-led delivery added clear value, supported by an experienced Programme Team, established partnerships and robust programme management systems. However, programme design complexity, compressed timescales and governance arrangements influenced delivery effectiveness, limiting opportunities for integration, shared learning and agile decision-making. Overall, the Programme delivered credible value for money, acting as a catalyst for wider social, economic and environmental benefits. Looking ahead, future place-based programmes would benefit from longer delivery periods, proportionate governance and administration, enhanced cross-priority coordination and improved mechanisms to capture wider outcomes, interim and longer-term impact.

APPENDIX 1

Shropshire UKSPF Main Programme and Rural Fund Projects Supported and Funding Allocated at Point of Approval³

Communities and Place: UKSPF Main Programme

Projects		Delivery Organisation	UKSPF Allocation £
1	Access to the Countryside (Phase 1)	Shropshire Council	£57,400
2	Armed Forces Community Outreach Project	Shropshire Council	£38,000
3	Attingham Park	National Trust	£245,000
4	Cambrian Station Building	Shropshire Council	£365,798
5	Civic Crowd Funding	Shropshire Council	£172,950
6	Co Working Space	Good 2 Great	£94,900
7	Community Kitchen	Shrewsbury Food Hub	£71,522
8	Community Partnership	Qube	£26,375
9	Cultural Compact	Shropshire Council	£163,950
10	Cultural Hubs and Spokes	Arts Alive	£75,600
11	Cycle Network	Shropshire Council	£30,000
12	Ellesmere Yard	Canal and River Trust	£112,000
13	Festival Square	Oswestry BID	£10,000
14	Flaxmill Cycle Hub	Flaxmill	£102,052
15	Footprint Gallery	Footprint Gallery	£12,000
16	Green Spaces Support	Energize	£62,682
17	Hands Together Ludlow	Hands Together Ludlow	£68,321
18	Highley Health and Wellbeing Centre	Shropshire Council and Partners	£20,000
19	Highly Health and Wellbeing Centre	NHS Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin	£150,000
20	Historic Towns	Shropshire Council	£19,250
21	Love Oswestry and Culture Connections	Shropshire Council	£120,500
22	Market Offer Oswestry and Wem	Oswestry Town Council	£10,000
23	Meadowside	Shrewsbury Town Foundation	£61,376
24	Montgomery Canal	Canal and River Trust	£20,000
25	On Your Bike	Shrewsbury BID	£434,372
26	Oswestry and Wem Markets	Oswestry Town Council	£93,385
27	Shrewsbury Castle	Shropshire Council	£30,000
28	Shrewsbury Sculpture	Shropshire Council	£132,470
29	Shropshire Community Climate Connectors	Marches Energy Agency	£165,488
30	St Johns the Beacon on the Hill	St Johns Church	£137,150
31	Strategic Infrastructure Partnership	Community Resource	£371,585
32	Vital Hive	The Hive	£99,987
Total Value			£3,574,113

³ The funding figures shown for each project represent the amounts **allocated** at the point of approval and do not necessarily reflect final **expenditure**

Supporting Communities and Place: Rural Fund

Projects		Delivery Organisation	UKSPF Allocation £
33	Access to the Countryside) Phases 1 and 2)	Shropshire Council	£522,100
34	Cambrian Station Building	Shropshire Council	£399,452
35	Crowdfunding - Green Spaces Grant	Shropshire Council	£120,000
36	Making Ripples	Canal and River Trust	£177,625
37	Oswestry Greenways	Shropshire Council	£500,000
38	Oswestry Indoor Market	Shropshire Council	£13,500
Total Value			£1,732,677

Supporting Local Business: Main UKSPF Programme

Projects		Delivery Organisation	UKSPF Allocation £
1	Agri-tech Growth and Resources for Innovation – 3 (AGRI – 3)	Aston University	£274,972.87
2	BID	Bridgnorth Town Council	£30,000
3	Clean Growth Marches & Worcestershire	Worcestershire County Council	£209,933.00
4	Cool Shropshire Farm Focused	E4 Environment	£30,000
5	Digital Innovator	Remote Recordings Ltd	£29,978
6	Employer Disability Support Service	Enable	£114,892.96
7a	Intensive Specialist Business Support	Marches Growth Hub	£108,000
7b	Intensive Specialist Business Support	Shropshire Growth Hub	£231,791.78
8	Marches Forward Partnership	Shropshire Council	£100,000.00
9	Market Towns	Shropshire Council	£25,000
10	People Portal	Shropshire Chamber of Commerce and Enterprise Ltd	£20,000
11	Shrop APF	Aston University	£370,108.87
12	Shropshire Council Destination Development Programme	Shropshire Council	£270,695.60
13a	Shropshire Destination Programme Management	Shropshire Tourism (Uk) Ltd	£66,931.17
13b	Shropshire Destination Programme Management	Shropshire Tourism (Uk) Ltd	£263,137.29
14	Shropshire Leadership Programme	Aston University	£317,684
15	Shropshire Manufacturing Growth Programme	Oxford Innovation Services LTD	£392,712.00
16	Shropshire Net Zero Leaders	The Clean Tech Business Group LTD	£150,000
17	Shropshire Start Up	Good 2 Great LTD	£286,923
18	Silverpreneurs®	Marches Growth Hub	£100,058
19	Small Equipment Grant Scheme	Shropshire Council	£187,500.00
20	Sustaining Shropshire	Harper Adams University	£642,409.49
21	Taste Not Waste	Shrewsbury Food Hub	£15,840.00

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22	Team Upskilling Programme	Shropshire Chamber of commerce and enterprise LTD	£373,000
23	Upskilling	Shropshire Chamber of Commerce and Enterprise Ltd	£11,000
24	Wem Business Network	Shropshire Council	£900
25	West Midlands Growth Programme	Birmingham City Council	£212,500
26	Work In Shrewsbury Programme	Shrewsbury BID	£447,772.60
Total Value			£5,283,740.63

Supporting Local Business: Rural Fund

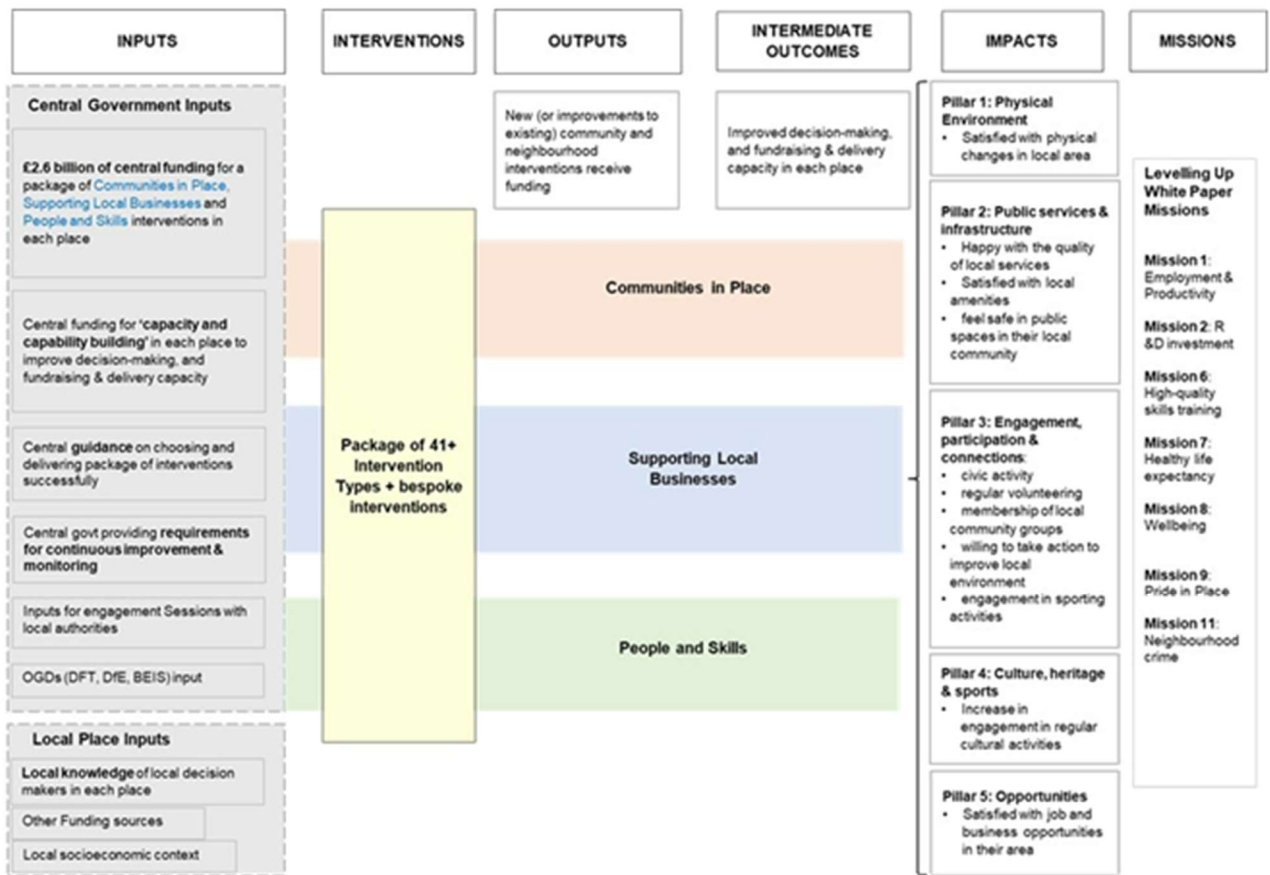
Projects		Delivery Organisation	Rural Fund Allocation £
27	Shropshire Small Equipment Grant	Shropshire Council	£787,500
28	West Midlands Growth Programme	Birmingham City Council	£212,500
Total Value			£1,000,000

People and Skills: Main UKSPF Programme

Projects		Delivery Organisation	UKSPF Allocation £
1	Digital Shropshire	School of Coding Ltd	£240,000
2	Shropshire Skills Hub	Shropshire Chamber of Commerce	£384,000
3	Shropshire Sports Collective	Shrewsbury Town Football Club and Partners	£227,318
4	Step up (Ignite)	Enable	£442,682
5	Work and Learn	School of Coding Ltd	£192,000
Total Value			£1,486,000

APPENDIX 2

High Level UKSPF Logic Model⁴



⁴ [UK Shared Prosperity Fund: evaluation strategy - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-evaluation-strategy)

APPENDIX 3

UKSPF Investment Priorities and Objectives (UK Shared Prosperity Fund: Prospectus, Updated 17 December 2025) and Missions⁵

<p>Communities and Place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strengthening our social fabric and fostering a sense of local pride and belonging, through investment in activities that enhance physical, cultural and social ties and amenities, such as community infrastructure and local green space and community-led projects.• Building resilient and safe neighbourhoods, through investment in quality places that people want to live, work, play and learn in, through targeted improvements to the built environment and innovative approaches to crime prevention.
<p>Supporting Local Business</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Creating jobs and boosting community cohesion, through investments that build on existing industries and institutions and range from support for starting businesses to visible improvements to local retail, hospitality and leisure sector facilities.• Promoting networking and collaboration, through interventions that bring together businesses and partners within and across sectors to share knowledge, expertise and resource and stimulate innovation and growth.• Increasing private sector investment in growth enhancing activities, through targeted support for small and medium sized businesses to undertake new-to firm innovation, adopt productivity enhancing, energy efficient and low carbon technologies and techniques and start or grow their exports.
<p>People and Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Boosting core skills and support adults to progress in work, by targeting adults with no or low level qualifications and skills in maths, and upskill the working population, yielding personal and societal economic impact, and by encouraging innovative approaches to reducing adult learning barriers (Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland only. In England, this is delivered through the Department for Education’s Multiply programme).• Reducing levels of economic inactivity through investment in bespoke intensive life and employment support tailored to local need. Investment should facilitate the join-up of mainstream provision and local services within an area for participants, through the use of one-to-one keyworker support, improving employment outcomes for specific cohorts who face labour market barriers.• Supporting people furthest from the labour market to overcome barriers to work by providing cohesive, locally tailored support including access to basic skills.• Supporting local areas to fund gaps in local skills provision to support people to progress in work, and supplement local adult skills provision e.g. by providing additional volumes; delivering provision through wider range of routes or enabling more intensive/innovative provision, both qualification based and non-qualification based. This should be supplementary to provision available through national employment and skills programmes.

⁵ [UK Shared Prosperity Fund: prospectus - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/103111/ukspfp-prospectus-17-dec-2025.pdf)

Missions within the UKSPF Investment Priorities

Building Pride in Place and Increasing Life Chances

Communities and Place

Supporting Local Business

People and Skills

Mission 9. By 2030, well-being will have improved in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing.

Mission 7. By 2030, the gap in Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE) between local areas where it is highest and lowest will have narrowed and by 2035 HLE will rise by five years.

Mission 1. By 2030, pay, employment and productivity will have risen in every area of the UK, with each containing a globally competitive city and the gap between the top performing and other areas closing.

Mission 1. By 2030, pay, employment and productivity will have risen in every area of the UK, with each containing a globally competitive city and the gap between the top performing and other areas closing.

Missions 8. By 2030, well-being will have improved in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing.

Mission 2. By 2030, domestic public investment in R&D outside the Greater South East will increase by at least 40% and over the Spending Review period by at least one third. This additional government funding will seek to leverage at least twice as much private sector investment over the long term to stimulate innovation and productivity growth.

Mission 6. By 2030, the number of people successfully completing high-quality skills training will have significantly increased in every area of the UK. In England, this will lead to 200,000 more people successfully completing high-quality skills training annually, driven by 80,000 more people completing courses in the lowest skilled areas.

Mission 11. By 2030, homicide, serious violence and neighbourhood crime will have fallen, focused on the worst affected areas.

Mission 7. By 2030, the gap in Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE) between local areas where it is highest and lowest will have narrowed and by 2035 HLE will rise by five years.

Missions 8. By 2030, well-being will have improved in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing.

APPENDIX 4

Shropshire UKSPF Programme Call Windows

1. January 2023 Call – Feasibility

Communities and Places, Local Business Support

Grants of up to £30,000 were available, with no match funding required for feasibility activities.

Applications were assessed on how well proposed activities aligned with the priorities of Shropshire's UKSPF Investment Plan. Eligible applicants were formally registered legal entities undertaking activity for the wider benefit of Shropshire communities rather than solely their own organisation, aimed at intermediary organisations that provide support to organisations.

Eligible activity included externally commissioned work, research, feasibility and options analysis, consultation, proof-of-concept development and evaluation.

2. April 2023 Call

Communities and Place

The Call invited applications from intermediary organisations to deliver support, services, amenities or facilities benefiting local communities, typically through community and place initiatives or grant programmes operating on a 'one-to-many' basis. Projects were required to demonstrate a clear, positive impact on their community, with funding available across relevant investment areas.

Activities were expected to address one or more key opportunities, including:

- Building on existing community assets, resources and infrastructure to strengthen physical and digital connections across market towns and localities.
- Boosting cultural capacity and social cohesion, diversifying the cultural offer and improving opportunities for participation across age groups.
- Promoting understanding of climate change, environmental and air quality issues, carbon reduction, and active lifestyles to enhance wellbeing and pride in place.
- Strengthening social and physical infrastructure that supports improved employment, education and volunteering opportunities, and developing high-quality community and cultural spaces.

Supporting Local Business

The Call invited applications from intermediary organisations to deliver initiatives or grant programmes providing business support on a 'one-to-many' basis designed to strengthen business resilience, innovation and growth across the County.

Activities were expected to address one or more key opportunities, including:

- Providing the right tools and support to help businesses invest in research and development, expand or relocate within Shropshire, and grow their workforce—particularly in sustainability, green industries and the creative and cultural sectors.
- Championing investment in infrastructure that underpins business growth, including town centres, business parks and growth corridors, and exploring opportunities for affordable, flexible co-working spaces in key locations.
- Encouraging collaboration through existing networks and partnerships such as business improvement districts, and helping businesses access recovery funds, UKSPF and other relevant funding streams.
- Linking with the Community and Place and People and Skills priorities to support housing, connectivity, workforce development and upskilling, ensuring Shropshire can attract and retain the talent needed for long-term economic growth and prosperity.

3. May 2023 Call

Supporting People and Skills

The Call invited applications from intermediary organisations to deliver initiatives or programmes providing skills development and employment support on a ‘one-to-many’ basis. It was aimed at improving employability, addressing skills gaps, and supporting greater inclusion across the County’s workforce.

Activities were expected to address one or more key opportunities, including:

- Providing intensive and wrap-around employment support for economically inactive people, helping them move closer to mainstream provision and employment, and supplementing this with additional life and basic skills support (including digital, English, maths, and ESOL) where local provision gaps exist.
- Increasing levels of digital inclusion through essential digital skills training, promoting the benefits of being safely online, and offering community-based support to help individuals gain confidence and trust to use digital tools effectively.
- Aligning with the objectives of the Shropshire Plan, the Marches Local Skills Report, and the Economic Growth Strategy 2022–2027, to build a more skilled, inclusive and resilient workforce that supports sustainable economic growth.

4. September 2023 Call

Communities and Place

The Call invited applications from intermediary organisations to deliver support, services, amenities or facilities to local communities through community and place initiatives or grant programmes operating on a ‘one-to-many’ basis. It was aimed at strengthening community infrastructure, enhancing local pride, and fostering wellbeing across the County.

Funding for projects in this Call could be funded from the Main Programme and/or the Rural Fund.

Activities were expected to address one or more key opportunities, including:

- Building on existing community assets, resources and infrastructure—particularly in market towns—to deliver a wide range of activities and services that bring people together and strengthen physical and digital connections across localities.
- Boosting cultural capacity and social cohesion to create a more diverse and inclusive cultural offer, benefiting all age groups and helping communities explore their aspirations and potential.
- Promoting awareness of climate change, environmental and air quality issues, and encouraging carbon reduction and active lifestyles to improve wellbeing and pride in place.
- Linking with the Supporting Local Business and People and Skills priorities by developing social and physical infrastructure that enhances employment, education and volunteering opportunities, and by creating high-quality, inclusive community and cultural spaces.

Supporting Local Business (capital)

The Call was designed to stimulate sustainable growth, innovation and collaboration across Shropshire’s economy. Investment supported intermediary organisations delivering business support initiatives and grant programmes on a ‘one-to-many’ basis.

Funding for projects in this Call could be funded from the Main Programme and/or the Rural Fund.

Activities were expected to address one or more key opportunities, including:

- Provide support to facilitate businesses to expand and grow in their physical locations and workforce, particularly in relation to sustainability and green industry.
- Champion investment in wider infrastructure that underpins business investment, focused on town centres and high streets, business parks and growth corridors - recognising the potential

to establish hubs providing support to supply chains and individuals moving into the county to access and develop its strengths and opportunities, and exploring affordable, flexible co-working space in key location.

- Collaborative working with the relevant networks and partnerships including, business improvement districts, assisting businesses to gain support through other relevant funding.
- Linking with the other two investment priorities of Community & Place and People & Skills.

The Call sought to strengthen Shropshire's key economic sectors, including the visitor economy, creative industries and green technologies, by building on the county's strong natural, cultural and heritage assets. Collaboration with business networks, partnerships and improvement districts was encouraged to help organisations access further funding opportunities. Overall, the investment was intended to create a more resilient, diverse and sustainable local economy, supporting quality jobs and linking business development with the wider Communities and Place and People and Skills priorities.

5. December 2023 Call

Supporting People and Skills

The Call invited applications from intermediary organisations to deliver initiatives or grant programmes providing skills development and tailored employment support on a 'one-to-many' basis. It was aimed at improving access to training, addressing skills shortages, and supporting individuals to achieve better employment outcomes and quality of life.

Activities were expected to address one or more key opportunities, including:

- Providing tailored support to help people in employment who are not currently reached by mainstream provision, enabling them to overcome barriers to accessing education and training.
- Funding local skills initiatives focused on developing the workforce needed to meet net zero and wider environmental goals, while encouraging engagement in lifelong learning to enhance wellbeing and social inclusion.
- Aligning with the objectives of the Shropshire Plan, the Marches Local Skills Report, and the Economic Growth Strategy 2022–2027, to build a skilled, adaptable and sustainable workforce that underpins future economic growth.

APPENDIX 5

Expenditure Achieved by Investment Priority within the Main UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund (excluding Management and Administration)

Main UKSPF Programme - Communities and Place: Spend Performance

Communities and Place (Revenue and Capital)	Actual Performance 31 March 2025
E1: Improvements to town centres & high streets	<i>£481,442.49</i>
E4: Enhancing existing cultural, historic & heritage institutions offer	<i>£1,005,166.35</i>
E6: Local arts, cultural, heritage & creative activities	<i>£452,643.28</i>
E11: Capacity building & infrastructure support local groups	<i>£999,402.05</i>
E14: Relevant feasibility studies	<i>£169,172.95</i>
Total Actual Performance	£3,107,827.12
Target Spend	£3,316,929.96

Main UKSPF Programme - Supporting Local Business: Spend Performance

Supporting Local Business (Revenue)	Actual Performance 31 March 2025
E16: Open markets & town centre retail & service sector	<i>£50,707.73</i>
E17: Development & promotion of visitor economy	<i>£567,718.46</i>
E20: R&D grants supporting innovative product & service development	<i>£1,245,011.97</i>
E23: Strengthening local entrepreneurial ecosystems	<i>£668,363.92</i>
E26: Growing the local social economy	<i>0</i>
E29: Supporting decarbonisation & improving the natural environment	<i>£335,195.47</i>
E30: Business support measures to drive employment growth	<i>£1,823,440.73</i>
E31: Support relevant feasibility studies	<i>£227,610.71</i>
Total Actual Performance	£4,918,048.99
Target Spend	£5,476,631.79

Main UKSPF Programme - People and Skills: Spend Performance

People and Skills (Revenue)	Actual Performance 31 March 2025
E33: Employment support for economically inactive people	£695,364.16
E36: Increase levels of digital inclusion, essential digital skills	£315,000
E37: Tailored support for the employed to access courses	£192,000
E38: Local areas to fund local skills needs	£384,000
Total Actual Performance	£1,586,364.16
Target Spend	£1,617,846.57

Rural Fund: Spend Performance (Capital)

Investment Priority	Target Spend 31 March 2025	Actual Performance 31 March 2025
Supporting Rural Communities	£1,732,677	£1,576,607.69
Supporting Rural Business	£856,826	£519,066.64
Total Allocation	£2,589,503	£2,095,674.33

APPENDIX 6

Outputs and Outcomes Achieved by Investment Priority within the Main UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund

Communities and Place Main UKSPF Programme	Target Outputs/outcomes 31 March 2025	Actual Performance 31 March 2025
E1: Improvements to town centres & high streets: Outputs		
Number of rehabilitated Premises	5	1
Amount of rehabilitated land	500m2	0
Amount of public realm created or improved	500m2	250m2
Number of low carbon energy infrastructure	4	3
E1: Outcomes		
Increased footfall	10%	40 – This was originally a % this was then change to a number
Reduced Vacancy rates (% decrease)	10%	1 - This was originally a % this was then change to a number of filled
Estimated carbon dioxide reduction as result of support	5%	0
E4: Enhancing existing cultural, historic & heritage institutions offer: Outputs		
Number of amenities/facilities created or improved	8	3
Amount of green or blue space Created or improved	500 m2	940510.4m2
No of tourism, Culture and Heritage assets created or improved	5	3
Volunteering Opportunities	0	25
Number of events and Activities supported	0	29
E4: Outcomes		
No of community led arts. Cultural, heritage and creative programmes as a result of the support	0	8
Improved engagement Numbers	0	172
Increased footfall 9%)	10	280 - This was originally a % this was then change to a number
Improved perception of facilities and amenities	0	20
E6: Local arts, cultural, heritage & creative activities: Outputs		
Number of organisations receiving grants	40	30
Number of local events/activities supported	15	688
Number of volunteering Opportunities	10	386
E6: Outcomes		
Number of community led arts. Cultural, heritage and creative programmes as a result of the support	15	33
Improved Engagement Numbers	0	13334
E11: Capacity building & infrastructure support local groups: Outputs		
Number of organisations receiving support other than grants	40	386
Number of facilities created /Improved	20	3

UK Shared Prosperity Fund – Shropshire Council

Number of organisations receiving grants	0	13
Volunteering Opportunities claimed	0	199
Number of events and Activities supported	0	18
E11: Outcomes		
Improved engagement Numbers	0	4458
Improved perceptions of facilities and amenities	15	10
E14: Relevant feasibility studies: Outputs		
Number of feasibility studies developed as a result of support	5	9
E14: Outcomes		
Number of projects arising from funded feasibility studies	2	4

Communities and Place Rural Fund	Target Outputs/outcomes 31 March 2025	Actual Performance 31 March 2025
E3: Creation of and improvements to local green spaces, community gardens, watercourses and embankments, along with incorporating natural features into wider public spaces Outputs		
Number of facilities supported or created	9	4
Amount of green or blue space created or improved (m2)	6,020	9,900
E3: Outcomes		
Increased footfall	4,742	0
Increased users of facilities or amenities	275	0
E4: Enhanced support for existing cultural, historic and heritage institutionsOutputs		
Number of facilities supported or created	1	1
No of tourism, Culture and Heritage assets created or improved (no)	1	1
E4: Outcomes		
Increased footfall	87	0
E7: Support for active travel enhancements in the local area: Outputs		
Total length of new or improved cycle ways or paths (KM) Put as Mtrs	19,400	10,893
Number of new or improved cycleways or footpaths	18	23
E7: Outcomes		
Increased use of cycleways or paths.	8,281	0

UK Shared Prosperity Fund – Shropshire Council

Supporting Local Business Main UKSPF Fund	Target Outputs/outcomes 31 March 2025	Actual Performance 31 March 2025
E16: Open markets & town centre retail & service sector : Outputs		
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	50	0
Number of enterprises receiving grants	30	0
Number of potential entrepreneurs assisted to be enterprise ready	30	0
E16: Outcomes		
Jobs created as a result of support Number of Full time equivalent	16	0
Jobs safeguarded as a result of support Number of full time equivalent	16	0
Number of new enterprises created as a result of support	16	0
Number of vacant units filled	5	0
E17: Development & promotion of visitor economy : Outputs		
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	50	147
Number of enterprises receiving grants	30	0
Number of local events or activities supported	15	35
E17: Outcomes		
Jobs created as a result of support Number of Full time equivalent	16	0
Jobs safeguarded as a result of support Number of full time equivalent	16	0
E20: R&D grants supporting innovative product & service development: Outputs		
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	100	248
Number of enterprises receiving grants	50	0
E20: Outcomes		
Number of organisations engaged in knowledge transfer activity following support	150	108
Number of enterprises adopting new to the firm technologies or processes	75	93
Number of new to market products	75	22
Jobs created as a result of support Number of Full time equivalent	0	72
E23: Strengthening local entrepreneurial ecosystem: Outputs		
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	120	286
Number of enterprises receiving grants	70	47
Number of potential entrepreneurs assisted to be enterprise ready	50	40
E23: Outcomes		
Jobs created as a result of support Number of Full time equivalent	70	17
Number of new enterprises created as a result of support	70	7
E26: Growing the local social economy: Outputs		
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	15	0
Number of enterprises receiving grants	10	0
Number of potential entrepreneurs assisted to be enterprise ready	5	0
E26: Outcomes		

UK Shared Prosperity Fund – Shropshire Council

Jobs created as a result of support Number of Full time equivalent	7	0
Number of new enterprises created as a result of support	3	0
E29: Supporting decarbonisation & improving the natural environment: Outputs		
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	80	159
Number of enterprises receiving grants	50	0
Amount of low or zero carbon energy infrastructure completed	200m2	0
E29: Outcomes		
Number of enterprises adopting new to the firm technologies or processes	60	11
Estimated Carbon dioxide equivalent reductions as a result of support	5%	6631 (tonnes) – This was originally a % reduction
E30: Business support measures to drive employment growth: Outputs		
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	200	551
Number of enterprises receiving grants	100	108
E30: Outcomes		
Jobs created as a result of support Number of Full time equivalent	60	82.34
Jobs safeguarded as a result of support Number of Full time equivalent	0	0
E31: Support relevant feasibility studies: Outputs		
Number of feasibility studies developed as a result of support	5	9
E31: Outcomes		
Number of projects arising from funded feasibility studies	10	2

Supporting Local Business Rural Fund	Target Outputs/outcomes 31 March 2025	Actual Performance 31 March 2025
Funding (capital grants) for small scale investment in micro and small enterprises in rural areas outputs		
Number of enterprises receiving grants	66	63
Outcomes		
Jobs created as a result of support Number of Full time equivalent	29	21
Jobs safeguarded as a result of support Number of full time equivalent	22	0
Number of enterprises adopting new to the firm technologies or processes	33	54

UK Shared Prosperity Fund – Shropshire Council

People and Skills Main UKSPF Programme	Target Outputs/outcomes 31 March 2025	Actual Performance 31 March 2025
E33: Employment support for economically inactive people: Outputs		
Number of socially excluded people accessing support	750	691
Number of people supported to access basic skills	750	217
Number of people receiving support to gain employment	360	575
Number of people receiving support to sustain employment	90	7
E33: Outcomes		
Number of people reporting increased employability through development of interpersonal skills funded by UKSPF	750	486
Number of people in employment, including self-employment, following support	360	86
Number of people sustaining employment for 6 months	90	24
E36: Increase levels of digital inclusion, essential digital skills: Outputs		
Number of people supported to access basic skills	250	372
Number of people supported to engage in life skills	250	350
E36: Outcomes		
People gaining a qualification or completing a course following support	250	354
E37: Tailored support for the employed to access courses: Outputs		
Number of people supported to participate in education	200	280
Number of people retraining	125	147
E37: Outcomes		
Number of people gaining qualifications, licences and skills	160	278
E38: Local areas to fund local skills needs: Outputs		
Number of people receiving support to gain a vocational licence	400	412
E38: Outcomes		
Number of economically active individuals engaged in mainstream skills education and training	400	409