

Please ask for: Paul Hickson

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Dear Councillor Martin

Response to queries raised at the 22nd November 2023 meeting of Scrutiny Committee – Climate and Place

I am writing to follow up on actions from the 22nd November 2023 meeting of Scrutiny Committee – Climate and Place, for the Economy, Employment and Planning Service to provide you with further information in relation to:

- The investment from Government funding programmes for regeneration schemes in rural areas of Somerset; and
- The impact, to date, of UK Shared Prosperity Funding in Somerset.

In relation to the spatial distribution of regeneration investment, recent Government funding streams for regeneration schemes have included Government selection of proposals based on strict eligibility and assessment criteria, including in relation to place. These Government funding arrangements severely limit local flexibility and have resulted in regeneration investment being particularly focussed on our three principal towns of Taunton, Bridgwater and Yeovil, although monies have also been secured for regeneration schemes in Glastonbury and Wellington. Specifically, Government funding for regeneration schemes in Somerset has been secured through:

- The Towns Fund under which Government defined a list of places which were eligible to develop proposals for a Town Deal. In Somerset, only Bridgwater and Glastonbury were eligible for, and have secured, a Town Deal;
- The Future High Street Fund under which proposals were required to cover high streets or town centres which exhibited high levels of social and economic activity. In Somerset, former District Councils were eligible to apply for funding and secured investment for Taunton and Yeovil; and

- The Levelling Up Fund under which Government defined priority Local Authority areas and limited the number of proposals a Local Authority could submit. In Somerset, former District Councils were eligible to apply for funding for regeneration and investment has been secured for schemes in Bridgwater and Wellington. Other Levelling Up Fund proposals, including for rural areas, were developed by former District Councils but did not receive MP support / Government approval.

Somerset Council policy positioning on future Government funding for regeneration will include seeking greater Government recognition of the specific challenges and needs of rural areas and greater local flexibility to access and direct funding in line with local evidence bases and priorities.

Turning to the impact to date of UK Shared Prosperity Funding (UKSPF), all contracts, grant funding agreements and service level agreements for funded UKSPF project activity set out performance requirements, including expected outputs and outcomes. Progress against these requirements is monitored and managed, with provision in arrangements to reduce or cease UKSPF funding should requirements not be met. In addition, all UKSPF-funded projects must submit a final evaluation report to Somerset Council assessing wider performance and impact. Currently available summary impact data are set out below, with the listed project activity continuing to be delivered and impacts continuing to flow.

Activity	Summary Impact Data
Building Better Somerset supporting individuals 18+ who are currently out of work to move into, or closer to, the labour market	Between 1 st April and 30 th September 2023: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15 people supported to engage in life skills; • 11 individuals supported to participate in education; • 3 volunteering opportunities supported; • 7 people supported to engage in job searching; • 1 individual receiving support to gain employment; • 1 individual in employment following support; and • 1 individual receiving support to sustain employment.
#Progress Somerset providing one-to-one support to young people in Somerset aged 15-18 who are, or are at risk of becoming, not in education, employment or training (NEET)	Between 1 st April and 30 th September 2023: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18 socially-excluded individuals accessing support; • 10 individuals supported to engage in life-skills; • 3 individuals supported to participate in education; • 7 individuals supported to engage in job-searching; • 2 individuals in employment following support; and • 1 individual in education / training following support;

Activity	Summary Impact Data
Go Green Scheme providing support to small and medium sized enterprises in Somerset to understand and identify measures to reduce their energy consumption	Between 1 st October and 31 st December 2023, 20 audits and action plans have been completed for Small and Medium-sized enterprises in Somerset identifying recommended energy savings of 671,036 kwh or 42% and recommended carbon savings (c02e) of 140 tonnes.

Impact data across wider activities will become available as UKSPF implementation progresses.

I hope that the above provides the further detail you were seeking.

Yours sincerely

Paul Hickson
 Service Director – Economy and Planning