**European Update for Cheshire and Warrington Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise Sector 16th November 2020**

**Highlights**

ESF Reserve Fund

ERDF Good Practice Booklet

**ERDF Reserve Fund**

All of the £80m in the ERDF Reserve Fund was committed, and is being distributed through the Growth Hub and the Local Authorities

• Reopening High Streets Safely Fund

• Kick Starting Tourism

* Support for Enterprises

The third round for Kick Start for Tourism and Support for Enterprises opens in Cheshire and Warrington on 30th November (branded the C&W Covid Recovery Grant).

*https://candwgrowthhub.co.uk/covid-19grantsbusrates*

A further £100m is now expected to be available through the Reserve Fund, and its is hoped this could be spent quickly (so match funding is not needed). It is not known whether this will be spent through an extension to the above three Funds, or whether there could be other projects.

**ESF Reserve Fund**

ESF announced funding to tackle Covid and lockdown through the loan of laptops or tablets to support participants on ESF projects, with £5m available for London, and a further £5m for the rest of England. Although there was a lot of interest initially, applicants were concerned about issues including the wait for the grant to be paid (perhaps four months or more after purchasing the equipment), and only a few bids were received. Around half of these were rejected in the appraisal process, which is disappointing.

There is still a substantial amount in the Reserve Fund (£324 million, about ten per cent of the 2014-20 funds), and there is concern that there has been little progress with this (indeed the Reserve Fund is getting bigger). Ideally, all of the funds should be committed by the end of 2020, with spend continuing to 2023, but likely that there will be some flexibility to commit funds, perhaps up to next March.

It is thought that there could well be some extensions to projects funded through ESFA and the Lottery, in order to commit more of the Reserve.

*www.gov.uk/european-structural-investment-funds*

**ESIF Coronavirus Response Page**

The ESIF Coronavirus Response Page is helpful for ESF, ERDF and EAFRD Projects, with a Q&A for each fund, for example wet signatures, re-profiling and delays. Latest update was on 10th November (Q18 and Q28) to reflect working hours on the extended or revised furlough - Job Retention Scheme.

*www.gov.uk/government/publications/european-structural-and-investment-funds-coronavirus-covid-19-response*

**Appraisals**

Appraisals of both ESF and ERDF bids are still slow. There were a substantial number of ESF bids that had been received but not allocated to an appraiser, this is now being reduced. The intention was to appoint an extra 62 people to the DWP’s ESF teams by October, although only five were to undertake appraisals. Unfortunately, only about half are in place, with the rest expected to be recruited by March next year.

**ERDF Projects Booklet**

Each year, the government produces a booklet on ESF and one on ERDF projects, giving good practice examples and showing the range of activity across England supported with money from Europe. The ERDF booklet is already available. Called “Supporting Local Growth 2020” it features projects including Sign Language, Social Housing, Community Led Local Development and Wellbeing research, as well as some specific covid responses, such as converting production from sail making to NHS scrubs.

*www.gov.uk/government/publications/european-regional-development-fund-case-studies*

**Getting Brexit done**

The UK left the EU at the end of January and is currently in the Transition Period until the end of December. Trade talks are continuing, but will need to be completed in the next few days, as any agreement has to be ratified by the European Parliament and by the UK. It seems that either there will be no deal, or a thin deal. A large lorry park in Warrington is planned. Our government is encouraging people to prepare for the extra bureaucracy and delays expected from the beginning of next year, and a letter was sent to VAT registered businesses in October. There is a daily update which people can sign up for, and a specific link for third sector organisations - at present, this covers employing people from outside the UK, data issues, and European Funding.

*www.gov.uk/email-signup?topic=%2Ftransition*

*[www.gov.uk/guidance/preparing-for-the-end-of-the-transition-period-if-you-work-in-the-civil-society-sectors](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/preparing-for-the-end-of-the-transition-period-if-you-work-in-the-civil-society-sectors)*

**UK Shared Prosperity Fund**

This manifesto commitment is a fund to replace the current ESF and ERDF monies (€13bn or about £11.7bn over seven years) which we would have received if we had stayed in the EU. Although there have been repeated promises to have a formal consultation on the proposals, it was recently stated that consultation had taken place, and it would be part of the three year Comprehensive Spending Review this Autumn. The three year review has now been deferred, and replaced with a one year review.

**Network for Europe**

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