**European Update for Cheshire and Warrington Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise Sector 24th June 2021**

**Highlights**

ESF funding and extensions
New Head of ESF for England
UK Shared Prosperity Fund - waiting for information

**ESF Funding**

ESF Priority 1.4 was approved by DWP as Parents First, run by Cheshire East Council.
ESF Priorities 1.1 and 1.2 were approved by DWP as Springboard Cheshire, run by Torus Foundation. This is for newly unemployed - young people (including school leavers, NEETs and at risk of NEETs), and over 50s. It will run from October 2021 until April 2023.

**ESF Extensions**

DWP has closed calls for ESF projects.
But it still has uncommitted ESF money (which it calls the Reserve Fund). In order to commit this, it has been encouraging well performing projects to be extended, including those through the ESFA and the Lottery.
Cheshire and Warrington Pledge Plus is intending to extend to 2023.
The BBO project run by Torus (funded by ESF and Lottery) has now been extended to June 2023, with extra funding. This project has twice been featured by the DWP in its yearly publication on ESF projects.

**ESIF Coronavirus Response Page**

The ESIF Coronavirus Response Page is helpful for ESF, ERDF and EAFRD Projects, with a Q&A for each fund. It was added to on 27th May and 23rd June for ESF, updating some answers and closing others. All projects still to be completed by 2023. *www.gov.uk/government/publications/european-structural-and-investment-funds-coronavirus- covid-19-response*

**ESF Action Note**

ESF Action Note 065/21 published 18/5/21. Revision to Annex IP2.2.
ESF Action Note 066/21 published 10/6/21. Electronic signatures. *www.gov.uk/government/publications/esf-action-notes-2014-to-2020-programme*

**UK Shared Prosperity Fund**

This fund will replace the £1.5bn a year we would have received had we stayed in Europe, and instead will be run by our own Government, starting in April 2022. It is intended to be simpler to operate. A pilot programme, just for 2021/22 and called the Community Renewal Fund was launched on 3rd March, but only a hundred areas (of over 300) were given priority status. This funding was primarily for Local Third Sector and Local Authorities (and didn’t refer to the LEPs). Approvals for those areas that bid should be announced late in July, which will give an idea of what UK-SPF might perhaps focus on.

Unlike the European Programmes which it replaces, the UK-SPF hasn’t properly involved the Partners (including the third sector) so along with everyone else, we await the announcement from the small group that has been developing the new programme. We would expect the new funding to require development of a strategy for local areas involving the local third sector and local authorities, as well as the other partners. Ideally this should be developed and in place well before the funds begin to be available next year.

**Growth Board meets - new Head of ESF England**

The Growth Board (Programme Monitoring Committee) met again on 22nd June. This meets every three months, and brings together the Partners for the English ESF and ERDF Programmes.
It was announced that the Head of English ESF, Geoff Hawker (appointed March last year) has left DWP for a new role for the Office of Nuclear Regulation, and been replaced with Clare Bonson.

A variety of ESF and ERDF Evaluations have been completed, and fed into the group preparing the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, but these studies have not yet been published, or made available for partners.

**Network for Europe**

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