# European Update for Cheshire and Warrington Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise Sector 31st March 2021

## Highlights

ESF Extensions

ERDF Reserve

ESF-Kickstart links

UK-Community Renewal Fund Prospectus and bidding timetable

UK Community Ownership Fund

Third Sector Forum - next steps after Brexit

## ESF calls

The two ESF calls for Cheshire and Warrington, closed on 11th March. All proposals are now in appraisal (which may take a while) - hope to hear soon which projects can go forward.

### [www.gov.uk/european-structural-investment-funds](http://www.gov.uk/european-structural-investment-funds)

**ESF and Kickstart**

Following the 061-21 ESF Action Note on support for people through ESF and Kickstart, a further note has been issued (064-21) to make things a little clearer.

*www.gov.uk/government/publications/esf-action-notes-2014-to-2020-programme*

## ESF Reserve Fund

DWP asked the LEPs connected with the local LEP level ESIF committees to put forward proposals for calls, as most of the ESIF’s don’t seem to have met since 2019, and appear to be fading away.

Given the small number of proposed calls resulting, DWP has now said it will no longer accept any more proposals from the LEPs, but will continue to process the ones it has, so we wait for a few more calls across parts of England (not expecting any more for Cheshire and Warrington).

There might be a further call for Laptops/Tablets for ESF participants, if the issues with the previous calls can be understood..

Instead we will use extensions of existing projects to commit the remaining money.

Under the N+3 rule, ESF projects funded through the 2014-20 Programme can continue to spend and claim up to the end of 2023, as appropriate.

The ESFA and the National Lottery Community Fund are extending their ESF funded projects by up to 50% providing they are performing well. The Lottery still does not appear to have made a formal announcement, but intended to have extensions in place from about now.

After much discussion, it has been agreed that ESF direct bid projects can be extended by up to 50% provided they are well performing. A recent ESF Action Note (063-21) explains it all.

The 50% was originally based on the original ESF amount in the Funding Agreement, so that there was no problem with procurement issues, but it has been confirmed that if the ESF project was extended (Project Change Request) through an open call, then the new, higher amount can be used as a basis for the 50%.

*www.gov.uk/government/publications/esf-action-notes-2014-to-2020-programme*

## ERDF Reserve Fund £56m extra to Local Authorities

Last year, ERDF committed its remaining £80m (the Reserve Fund), directly supporting the 314 local authorities in England with £50m for Reopening High Streets Safely, and the LEP Growth Hubs with £30m of support for SMEs. We were allocated £615k for the Growth Hub, and £831k for LA areas - this High Street Fund gave £340k to Cheshire East, £305k to Cheshire West and Chester, and £186k to Warrington

The **Welcome Back Fund** announced 20th March, is new ERDF money, but just £56m. No match required. This is not for the Growth Boards but for local Authority areas to continue work opening up the High Streets. It will about double the allocation to each LA, so £896k extra to Cheshire and Warrington. £340k goes to Cheshire East, £370k to Cheshire West and Chester, and £186k to Warrington. Any areas that haven’t fully, or even partly, spent their original allocation can roll it forward into this second phase.

The announcement of funding might have come out earlier than expected, and includes an extra £5m or so for coastal areas. The money can help councils to boost tourism, improve green spaces and provide more outdoor seating areas, markets and food pop-ups.

The new funding available was calculated from progress with the 2019 appraisals (still under way), underspends, and the £-€ exchange rate. It is believed any further differences can be managed, so this should be the last new allocation of ERDF funding.

*www.gov.uk/government/news/new-raft-of-measures-to-prepare-our-high-streets-and-seaside-resorts-for-summer*

## Operational Programmes

While the latest revision of the ESF Operational Programme was agreed at the end of 2020 and should be available on [gov.uk](http://gov.uk) soon, it is now thought that a further final version will be negotiated towards the end of 2021. This could help to make sure we hit the final targets.

### [www.gov.uk/government/publications/european-social-fund-operational-programme-2014-to-2020](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/european-social-fund-operational-programme-2014-to-2020)

## 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 updated on 25th and 29th March for ESF. (questions 9, 18, 28). All projects still to be completed by 2023.

### [www.gov.uk/government/publications/european-structural-and-investment-funds-coronavirus-covid-19-response](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/european-structural-and-investment-funds-coronavirus-covid-19-response)

## UK Shared Prosperity Fund pilot for 2021/22

**Community Regeneration Fund**

From next April, we will have the UK-Shared Prosperity Fund at £1.5bn a year, replacing the money we would have received from Europe for ESF and ERDF. In the meantime, the **Community Renewal Fund** has been announced - but time is short for us to plan and bid.

The Community Renewal Fund Prospectus was launched on 3rd March during the budget, and on 24th the Technical Notes (both for Lead Authorities and Bidders) were published, along with the Application Form, Selection Criteria, etc.

The money is mainly for local authorities and third sector organisations, working locally to tackle problems. It is wider than the European money it replaces, and should be simple to operate. The money will have to be spent between August 2021 and March 2022, and innovation and evaluation is encouraged - the idea is to prepare for the full scale UK-SPF in the following year.

All 368 local authority areas in the UK are involved (called Places), and 100 of these have been designated Priority Places, using an interesting algorithm. The Lead Authority is a Combined Authority, County Council or similar and has until 18th June to assemble proposals of up to £3m per local authority and send them to London. Decisions on funding are expected by late July. The Lead Authority gets a payment up front, handles the money to the individual projects, and has a second payment, based on spend, after the end of March.

This is not based on need, but is competitive. The UK Government and Ministers makes the final decisions. Then the money is transferred to local organisations.

For us, that means we have three Lead Authorities, and three Places, but no Priority Places.

**Lead Authority Place**

Cheshire West and Cheshire County Council Cheshire West and Cheshire

Cheshire East Council Cheshire East

Warrington Borough Council Warrington

Most Projects won’t get funded. If only the Priority Places are successful, that’s on average £2.2 m per Place, if every place is successful, that averages only £600k per place. But next year the main scheme has seven times as much, every year - which interestingly averages over £3m per place, so time spent thinking though and preparing proposals and working in partnership won’t be wasted.

The aim of the CRF is to spend a bit of money and prepare for the full fund - so innovation and evaluation is important.

CRF covers

Investment in skills

Investment in local business

Investment in communities and place

Supporting people into employment

This is not just the same as ESF- it should be simpler, with faster payments, and it’s much wider than training courses. We are moving away from just increasing GDP to looking at Health and Wellbeing. It can include feasibility projects for net zero, and local energy projects, exploring culture led regeneration and community development, improving green space and preserving important local assets, promoting rural connectivity.

This is a once in a generation opportunity to develop locally based solutions to local problems, with the third sector taking a lead, working in partnership with each other and the Local Authorities.

*www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-community-renewal-fund-prospectus*

## Community Ownership Fund

This is only for Community Groups. From this summer, a new £150m fund will provide half the cost (up to £250k, and more for sports) to purchase an asset which can be run by the community for community benefit - shop, post office, pub, theatre, museum, music venue, sports centre etc (and perhaps the CRF could fund early stages for people to prepare proposals?) The Prospectus is due soon.

## Forum

The Third Sector across the UK will be holding a Zoom meeting on the morning of 23rd April, to discuss any issues around Brexit as it effects the voluntary and community sector, and look to the future now that we have left Europe. It has been called by the leads for the four nations - NCVO, SCVO, NICVA and WCVA. It looks to be of interest - and potentially useful in the future.

www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/life-after-eu-membership-what-next-for-civil-society-in-the-uk-tickets-146638739417

## Turing - bids from March

The portal is now open, and applications are invited.

### www.turing-scheme.org.uk/news/apply-now-for-turing-scheme-funding

**Network for Europe**

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