

Agenda Item	19
Report No	ECI/48/2023

The Highland Council

Committee: Economy and Infrastructure

Date: 17 August 2023

Report Title: UK Shared Prosperity Fund

Report By: Interim Depute Chief Executive

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides an update on delivery of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. It details progress across the range of actions underway and sets out a proposal for the delivery of the Skills programme.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:-

- i. **Note** the successful pull down of the 2023/24 and 2024/25 UKSPF allocations and delivery progress across the programme; and
- ii. **Agree** to the proposed Skills Programme as set out in Appendix 2.

3 Implications

3.1 **Resource** – The Highland UKSPF allocation is up to £9,445,515 over a three-year period (1 April 2022 to 31 March 2025) The Council has secured its 2022/23 award (£1,461,484) and its 2023/24 award (£2,465,696) The 2024/25 award (£5,538,335) is indicative and will only be released in full subject to successful reporting and delivery of the 22/23 and 23/24 activity.

3.2 **Legal** - The Council is the accountable body for the management of the Fund and hence responsible to ensure that all funds are used solely in line with the UKSPF Prospectus and Additional Guidance issued. Funding is also subject to compliance with the terms of a Memorandum of Understanding. If the Council is managing the Fund but other organisations are delivering activity, appropriate agreements will also be entered into with each affected party.

- 3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island)** - The overarching objective of the UKSPF is to build pride in place and to increase life chances. In itself the Fund will not achieve this and therefore the challenge in utilising the Fund to best effect, is how it aligns with and brings value to other activity.
- 3.4 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever** - Across the Fund there are a range of interventions (activities) which support just transition and net zero. As above, the Fund will not achieve this on its own and therefore the challenge in utilising the Fund to best effect is how it aligns with and brings value to other activity.
- 3.5 **Risk** - A key risk is that the Fund will not be fully utilised within each of the financial year allocations and potentially be lost to Highland. Delivery to date has been sufficient for the full release of the 2022/23 and 2023/24 awards. The risk remains high as the full release of the 24/25 award, requires good delivery progress during 2023/24. To help mitigate against this, programme design and delivery is largely based around existing delivery mechanisms and added value to existing activity.
- 3.6 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** – There are no specific implications connected with the delivery of the UKSPF.
- 3.7 **Gaelic** - Gaelic will be included into all relevant projects and communications in line with Council policy.

4 Progress Report

- 4.1 In February 2023, Committee considered a report providing background to the Highland UKSPF programme, the key challenges faced with delivery, and it set out a Delivery Plan for Members with a detailed commentary on progress across each of the Priority projects. It also agreed that the City Region Deal Member Monitoring Group remit be extended to include the UKSPF and that UKSPF Programme Delivery Reports be presented to Economy and Infrastructure Committee on six monthly basis.
- 4.2 Since February 2023, given the late award of 2022/23 grant, the main focus of effort was to ensure that 2022/23 activity commenced, and that the Council could account for the funds as committed/spent. Following reporting to the Member Monitoring Group on 18 April 2023, the required end of year report was submitted to the UK Govt. on 2 May 2023. On 5 July 2023, following its assessment of this report, the UK Govt. formally advised that it was releasing the full 2023/24 award.
- 4.3 **Appendix 1** provides an update for Members on each of the Interventions.
- 4.4 Members will note that within the People and Skills priority there are two Interventions relating to Skills. Work with partners (UHI, SDS, FSB, the Caithness, Lochaber and Inverness Chambers of Commerce and HIE) has been underway to develop this programme and to determine how to utilise the Funds to best effect.

4.5 The final proposal seeks to strike a balance between focus (of purpose and impact) and reach (ensure it delivers what businesses need across Highland). Key to achieving focus is use of the Fund to provide training support for Inverness Castle as a priority project and to the support for Green Skills. The adoption of a 2 phase Challenge Fund approach and priority given to applications that are consortia or partnership, seeks to best achieve reach across Highland as in **Appendix 2**.

Designation: Interim Depute Chief Executive

Date: 24 July 2023

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Background Papers: None

Appendices: Appendix 1 - Delivery Plan Progress Report
Appendix 2 – Highland UKSPF Skills Initiative

Appendix 1 UKSPF Delivery Plan

Key programme Elements

The following table summarises by Priority, within the four thematics, the planned initiatives alongside budgetary allocation and anticipated outcomes.

1 - Communities and Places				
Intervention	Summary/ approach	Budgetary & Outcomes		Actions
C&P S1: Place Based Investments, regeneration, and town centre improvements	Funds will be used to support place-based projects. UKSPF will sit alongside and be managed together with other area-based funds to support projects identified in Area Place Plans.	2022 - 23	£83,057 (100% capital)	<p><u>22/23 spend</u> In accord with Feb 2023 report the allocation being planned for utilisation alongside current Community Regeneration Fund programme to fill project funding gaps.</p> <p><u>23/24 and 24/25</u> As above, has been incorporated into 23/24 and 24/25 Community Regeneration Fund programme. An initial Challenge Fund has been launched, informed by Area Place Plans, where exist.</p> <p>Reflecting the end March 25 spend deadline, consideration will be given to awarding/prioritising spend for projects that deliver early in 2024/25</p>
		2023 - 24	£125,000 (£75k capital, £50k revenue)	
		2024 - 25	£600,000 (£450K capital, £150k revenue)	
C&P S2: Local Challenge funds & Feasibility	The strength of community action during the Covid pandemic is well documented with communities continuing to take the lead, develop local projects and infrastructure to deliver against community priorities.	2022 - 23	zero	<p>23/24 and 24/25 Initial focus on completing Area Plans for all areas which will be linked to wider Community Regeneration Fund programme. Given the definitive end March 25 spend deadline, consideration on awarding will include prioritising spend for projects that deliver early in 2024/25</p>
		2023 - 24	£125,000 (100% capital)	
		2024 - 25	£356,442 (100% capital)	

	<p>Work has been ongoing to identify and support project development. Utilising UK SPF funding will support and enhance local delivery.</p> <p>Challenge funds will be established to enhance the sustainability of existing community businesses and support their success. This focus is anticipated to lead to an increased number and level of community led projects in new areas and sectors.</p>			
<p>C&P S6: Active travel enhancements and small-scale transport projects</p>	<p>Masterplans / Audits have been produced for 10 settlements across Highland. The interventions identified range from behaviour change initiatives to mobility hubs, to physical adaptation of the road network for active travel. Some specific examples of the identified interventions: Safe Non-motorised User Crossings, Active Travel routes (segregated from vehicular traffic), Public Realm improvements including provision of high-quality cycle parking, Traffic Calming, Quiet Streets/ Low Traffic Neighbourhoods, charging points.</p>	2022 - 23	£83,058 (100% capital)	<p>22/23 spend Work completed on Nairn Active Travel project.</p> <p>23/24 and 24/25 Linking up with current Active Travel Masterplan programme identifying appropriate project(s) to use funds effectively. Also review potential community travel interventions.</p> <p>Given the definitive end March 25 spend deadline, consideration will be given to awarding/prioritising spend for projects that deliver early in 2024/25</p>
		2023 - 24	£247,230 (£110k capital, £137K revenue)	
		2024 - 25	£530,000 (£290k capital, £240k revenue)	

	These will be taken forward and delivered against the plans through feasibility studies, producing concept and technical designs, community consultation and subsequent construction of interventions resulting in an enhanced image of Highlands as a low carbon region.			
C&P S8: Impactful volunteering and/or social projects	The strength of community action during the Covid pandemic is well documented with communities continuing to take the lead, develop local projects and infrastructure to deliver against community priorities. However achieving impact and ensuring that projects continue requires volunteers both to continue but also ensure a pipeline of new volunteers. This will be achieved by building on and adding value to existing initiatives and support based on solid understanding of needs and demands.	2022 - 23	zero	23/24 and 24/25 Small value funds to be considered alongside C&P S9 and S10 below and supportive of community regeneration interventions (S1). Has been incorporated into 23/24 and 24/25 Community Regeneration Fund programme
		2023 - 24	£20,000 (100% revenue)	
		2024 - 25	£25,000 (100% revenue)	
C&P S9: Investment in capacity building and resilience for local groups	Highland has a large number of community groups however often the initial enthusiasm can be overtaken by reality and fatigue which can impact their resilience and sustainability is affected by the increasing cost of living and several communities are already acting e.g. community fridges, car-pooling, community orchards.	2022 - 23	zero	23/24 and 24/25 Small value funds to be considered alongside C&P S8 above and S10 below and supportive of community regeneration interventions (S1). Has been incorporated into 23/24 and 24/25 Community Regeneration Fund programme
		2023 - 24	£20,000 (100% revenue)	
		2024 - 25	£20,000 (100% revenue)	

	Better practice will be identified under research and feasibility which will be shared throughout all communities with small pilot funds available to support development or launch which is often a gap in general project support available.			
C&P S10: Community measures to reduce the cost of living	Highland, in line with all regions, is affected by the increasing cost of living and a number of communities are already taking action to address symptoms e.g. community fridges, car-pooling, community orchards. Better practice will be identified under research and feasibility studies and shared throughout all communities and small pilot funds available to support development of measures.	2022 - 23	zero	22/23 None 23/24 and 24/25 Small value funds to be considered alongside C&P S8 and S9 above and supportive of community regeneration interventions (S1). Has been incorporated into 23/24 and 24/25 Community Regeneration Fund programme
		2023 - 24	£20,000 (100% revenue)	
		2024 - 25	£25,000 (100% revenue)	
C&P S11: Relevant feasibility studies	Development of Area Place Plans to set out the vision, ambition and priorities for people and place in a particular area will be established. Key themes will aim to address inequality, net zero and sustainability and investment and development. This will support targeting resources, service delivery and provide a clear vision for attracting external investment.	2022 - 23	£150,000 (100% revenue)	22/23 Work commenced to initiate the preparation of Area Place Plan coverage across all Highland. Committed to be used alongside existing Community Regeneration Fund providing funds for early-stage project feasibility studies 23/24 and 24/25 To be used alongside existing Community Regeneration Fund providing funds for early-stage project feasibility studies
		2023 - 24	£50,000 (100% revenue)	
		2024 - 25	£50,000 (100% revenue)	

	<p>On completion or in gestation, if appropriate, establish funding support for communities to develop project concepts/proposals.</p>			
<p>C&P S12: Digital infrastructure for local community facilities</p>	<p>Local facilities often provide an essential social hub for communities with increasing need to provide access to web portals for residents to access help and support. It is recognised that by supporting communities with a small pump priming amount can lever out other support to invest into their digital infrastructure.</p> <p>This will be complemented by, in tandem with support for local businesses provide advice, informational webinars/ training, and advisor assessment to address needs.</p>	2022 - 23	zero	<p>23/24 and 24/25 Small value for specified purpose being considered alongside other Community Regeneration Fund project funding S1 & S2.</p>
		2023 - 24	£25,000 (100% capital)	
		2024 - 25	£50,000 (100% capital)	

2 – Supporting Local Business				
Intervention	Summary/ approach	Budgetary & Outcomes		
SLB S14: Development and promotion of the visitor economy	UK SPF support will help to enhance existing funding streams to develop key local infrastructure such as toilet provision, motorhome facilities including waste disposal, which can support tourism growth and wider economic development for local areas. Building on and enhancing existing funding streams will add greater value to this area of growing pressure for communities. In addition opportunities to support major events and activities will be progressed to enhance image, perception, and economic development within Highland.	2022 - 23	£200,000 (£100k capital, £100k revenue)	22/23 Agreed contribution towards the UCI Mountain Bike World Championships in August 23. 23/24 and 24/25 To be linked to priority projects identified in Council's approved Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan. Revenue option in 24/25 allows for UCI Mountain Bike World Cup event and/ or other of similar event of international status to be supported.
		2023 - 24	£50,000 (100% capital)	
		2024 - 25	£200,000 (£100k capital, £100k revenue)	
SLB S15 SME development grants and support	Local SME businesses in private and third sector have opportunities to create and strengthen or introduce alternative operational/ production/ manufacturing processes, develop new markets, products or services but are often constrained by resource availability whether of funding, people, or skills in workforce. A suite of start-up and growth grants will be provided.	2022 – 23	Nil	23/24 and 24/25 Extension of the start-up and growth business grants that up until end 2022/23 funded via Council's Economic Prosperity Fund. Strong interest and use of funds being experienced. Linked to SLB S20 – expert start-up and growth specialist advisory support.
		2023 - 24	£190,000 (£25k capital, £165k revenue)	
		2024 - 25	£461,000 (£211k capital, £250k revenue)	

SLB S18: Investing in enterprise infrastructure, site development projects	Current indicators are that there is a need for enhanced business infrastructure in areas of the Highlands and working in conjunction with SLB S19 partnerships will establish and develop opportunities. Given gestation time for projects it is anticipated that pump priming may be required in the period 2024–25 to support small, targeted developments.	2022 – 23	Nil	24/25 Site(s) or solutions for infrastructure to be identified and progressed in 2023/24
		2023 - 24	Nil	
		2024 - 25	£200,000 (100% capital)	
SLB S19: Strengthening local entrepreneurial ecosystems	Many private, third and public sector organisations are active in the Highlands seeking to support businesses to trade and grow. While many already collaborate with each other, this ecosystem is not always as connected and organised as it could be. Efforts in the first instance seek to investigate and identify ways in which this could be improved before more significant investment in 2024 – 25.	2022 - 23	£25,000 (100% revenue)	22/23 Feasibility study initiated to review the breadth of public and private investors active in Highland with an aim to determine whether options exist to better align and co-ordinate investment in businesses.
		2023 - 24	£50,000 (100% revenue)	
		2024 - 25	£200,000 (100% revenue)	23/24, 24/25 Assuming demand exists then this will be used to initiate or implement potential solutions.
SLB S20: Expert business advice and support programmes, local and regional	Establish access to specialist advisors. It is often necessary to access advice of a specialist nature, and this supports existing advisors in addressing the needs of their client businesses.	2022 - 23	£75,000 (100% revenue)	22/23, 23/24 and 24/25 Underway and being used to fund expert start-up and growth specialist advisers and support staff.
		2023 - 24	£150,000 (100% revenue)	
		2024 - 25	£150,000 (£100% revenue)	

SLB S27: Support relevant feasibility studies	It is critical that any intervention is based on a real understanding of needs e.g. infrastructure SLBS18, Ecosystems SLB S19, Finance etc. Targeted research initiatives will be undertaken to provide robust intelligence where required.	2022 - 23	£16,115 (100% revenue)	22/23, 23/24, 24/25 Small funds to allow Council and partners to undertake business related feasibility studies alongside SLB S18 & S19.
		2023 - 24	£22,230 (100% revenue)	
		2024 - 25	£50,443 (100% revenue)	
SLB S29: Business support aligned with local, regional, and Scottish policy	This project seeks to support businesses and organisations to target net-zero, decarbonisation, transition.	2022 - 23	Nil	23/24, 24/25 Development of method and support to complement and support implementation in working with Climate Challenge teams, Business Energy Scotland/ Energy Savings Trust by adding value to current over-subscribed advisory services supporting business to transition to net-zero.
		2023 - 24	£170,000 (100% revenue)	
		2024 - 25	£395,000 (100% revenue)	

3 - People & Skills				
Intervention	Summary/ approach	Budgetary & Outcomes		
P&S S31: Employment support for economically inactive people	<p>Access to employability In 2023/24 and 2024/25, a programme of employability events in communities across the Highlands, offering a local and accessible space where public sector partners, clients and employers can meet and sign-post options to help people into employment and help people into employment and develop skills.</p> <p>Pre-employability support A package of intensive support to work with clients across the Highlands to help them overcome barriers (e.g. poverty, health, debt, homelessness) which preclude them from looking for work.</p> <p>Specialist support In 2024/25, following on from these elements, offer specialist support for those who have been on the 5-stage employability pipeline for more than 3-months.</p>	2022 - 23	£66,115 (100% revenue)	<p>22/23 Immediate spend linked to existing work programme of Council's Employment team/working in partnership with Highland Employability Partnership (HEP) – as approved by Committee in Aug 22</p> <p>23/24, 24/25 Activity and spend linked to Annual Employment Delivery Plan (presented/approved by Committee and HEP in May 23) – thereby ensuring that UKSPF aligns with and adds value to other funds secured via Scot Govt. The main intent is to strengthen and support specialist employability services within Highlands.</p>
		2023 - 24	£350,000 (£50k capital, £300k revenue)	
		2024 - 25	£636,278 (100k capital, £536k revenue)	

	Targeted employment support In 2024/25 offer the opportunity to access funds which can be used to invest in equipment to support skills training for economically inactive people.			
P&S S32: Courses including basic skills for those not economically inactive	Specialist support (PS2b) Ongoing review of programmes and courses will ensure that those not currently economically active will receive support, guidance, and training relevant to their needs and employment opportunities in their community. Outcome – 500 people engaged in education / training	2022 - 23		23/24, 24/25 Activity and spend linked to Annual Employment Delivery Plan in line with Committee approval in May 23 – thereby ensuring that UKSPF aligns with and adds value to other funds secured via Scot Govt.
		2023 - 24	£50,000 (100% revenue)	
		2024 - 25	£100,000 (100% revenue)	
P&S S35: Employability Programmes and advice – No One Left behind agenda etc	Specialist support (PS2b) In 2024/25 this element of the project will focus on people already in work, ensuring that they can sustain employment for the long term.	2022 - 23	Nil	23/24, 24/25 Activity and spend linked to Annual Employment Delivery Plan in line with Committee approval in May 23. – thereby ensuring that UKSPF aligns with and adds value to other funds secured via Scot Govt
		2023 - 24	Nil	
		2024 - 25	£100,000 (100% revenue)	
P&S S36 Local areas to fund local skills needs	Skills Initiatives being scoped out with a number of concepts being considered as part of a Challenge Fund process e.g.:	2022 - 23	£200,000 (100% revenue)	22/23 Utilised funds as contribution towards the one-year extension of Science Skills Academy.
		2023 - 24	£182,230 (£50k capital, £132k revenue)	

	<p>Skills Brokerage Fund a Highland Skills Brokerage website, linking local people and employers with a view to filling staff shortages in a flexible way and to organise training locally to ensure that skills shortages are addressed, and incomes grow.</p> <p>Targeted employment training support Support development of skills training solutions led by employers to support specific skills shortages in Highland.</p> <p>Hospitality/ Care Academy Support the establishment of academies in the Highlands, to support the development of the sectors and attract and retain top quality staff.</p>	2024 - 25	£650,000 (£600k revenue, £50k capital)	<p>23/24, 24/25 Working with a local partnership to establish a Skills Initiative to address skills, primarily Green based project, with the intent to use UKSPF as alternative if other funds not available or to bring added value (scale and/or scope) to current skills initiatives.</p> <p>Close alignment with P&S S37 below with a focus on skills to support transition to net-zero.</p> <p>Also, close alignment with Annual Employment Delivery Plan as approved by Committee and HEP in May 23 see interventions above.</p> <p>Given the definitive end March 25 spend deadline, consideration will be given to awarding/prioritising spend for projects that deliver early in 2024/25</p>
P&S S37: Green Skills courses	<p>Green Skills (PS6) Recognising the changing nature of employment needs and opportunities resulting from the Green Agenda working with employers and organisations develop training focused on real needs for the future. Examples would be in renewables, changing from ICE vehicles to electric powered etc.</p>	2022 - 23	£50,000 (100% revenue)	<p>22/23 Early stage works underway to establish and launch small scale skills grant scheme for Highland businesses. Close alignment with P&S S36.</p> <p>23/24, 24/25 Continuation and expansion of delivery in 24/25. Given the definitive end March 25 spend deadline, consideration will be given to awarding/prioritising spend for projects that deliver early in 2024/25</p>
		2023 - 24	£50,000 (100% revenue)	
		2024 - 25	£170,164 (100% revenue)	

3a - Multiply Sub theme of People & Skills				
Intervention	Summary/ approach	Budgetary & Outcomes		
M S42: Courses designed to increase confidence in numbers	Opportunities for the Highland's population above 19 years of age to participate in numeracy skills courses – signposting to quality assured resources, opportunities and support led by a wide range of partners in various sectors – e.g. colleges, trade unions, employers, charities, and community groups On and off-line or tutor led courses delivered in local facilities to ensure accessibility for all.	2022 - 23	£211,063 (100% revenue)	22/23, 23/24, 24/25 A standalone programme has been developed to deliver Multiply Programme. In 22/23 the main spend was contracted with 12 local organisations following a Challenge Fund across the thematics of Multiply. Liaison and open communications with the successful organisations being maintained and progress monitored. Second phase Challenge Fund to be progressed, subject to resource availability, before end 2023.
		2023 - 24	£243,535 (100% revenue)	
		2024 - 25	£243,535 (100% revenue)	
M S43: Courses for parents wanting to increase numeracy skills	Encourage parental and family numeracy skills to aid educational support for children by signposting to quality assured resources, opportunities and support led by a wide range of partners and agency providers in geographic locales – e.g. schools, colleges, charities, and community groups	2022 - 23	£141,038 (100% revenue)	As above
		2023 - 24	£162,736 (100% revenue)	
		2024 - 25	£162,736 (100% revenue)	
M S44: Courses for prisoners, those recently released or on temporary licence	Support through quality assured resources, opportunities, and support to enhance numeracy skills and abilities Target developing employability potential and reducing propensity to return to previous lifestyle.	2022 - 23	£14,301 (100% revenue)	As above
		2023 - 24	£16,501 (100% revenue)	
		2024 - 25	£16,501 (100% revenue)	

M S45: Courses aimed at encouraging people to upskill to access jobs/careers	It is critical that Highland ensures that our population has opportunities to upskill which will be achieved by signposting to quality assured resources, opportunities and support led by a wide range of partners in various sectors – e.g. colleges, trade unions, employers, charities, and community groups. Target to enhance employability potential.	2022 - 23	£28,109 (100% revenue)	As above
		2023 - 24	£32,433 (100% revenue)	
		2024 - 25	£32,433 (100% revenue)	
M S47: Innovative programmes delivered with employers	Working along with partners e.g. SDS, WEA, HIE introduce course programme targeted to employers to improve numeracy of staff in relevant areas e.g. budgeting, cost control, operators' skills.	2022 - 23	£42,410 (100% revenue)	As above
		2023 - 24	£48,935 (100% revenue)	
		2024 - 25	£48,935 (100% revenue)	
M S49: Courses designed to help people use numeracy to manage money	Numeracy can help individuals, groups, businesses and all members of communities. take control of how they spend, build reserves and plan for the future. Courses will be designed and delivered on and offline face to face to cover the basics and develop confidence in managing money.	2022 - 23	£28,109 (100% revenue)	As above
		2023 - 24	£32,433 (100% revenue)	
		2024 - 25	£32,434 (100% revenue)	
	Numeracy, once the basics are mastered, can unlock other ways to manage money whether personal or corporate.			

	Helpful financial aids, such as budgeting tools, assume a basic understanding of numeracy and will be introduced to build the confidence and skills needed to get on top of everything from understanding cash movements, budgeting, and bills to credit cards and cash.			
M S51: Provision developed in partnership with community organisations	To reach those with least numeracy; knowledge, skills and understanding to increase their ability and confidence with numeracy in daily life. Encouraging local community organisations to establish programmes and seek continuation beyond March 2025.	2022 - 23	£28,109 (100% revenue)	As above
		2023 - 24	£32,433 (100% revenue)	
		2024 - 25	£32,434 (100% revenue)	

Highland UKSPF Skills Initiative**Overview**

The proposal developed seeks to strike a balance between focus (of purpose and impact) and reach (responsiveness to identified individual commercial led skills needs). The Highland programme has a financial allocation split between Local Area Skills at 71% and Green Skills at 21%.

Given the imperative to transition to net zero, and the flexibility provided within the UKSPF to reallocate funding within existing priorities, it is proposed that the funds available for Skills training (Local Area Skills £274,720 and Green Skills £259,357) are in effect combined and managed as one, with priority focus first given to Green Skills.

Proposal

It is proposed that the Skills funding available be used as follows:

Priority Projects

UKSPF skills funding (£200k from the 2022/23 and £20k from the 2023/24 allocation), along with HIE funds, is currently being used to extend the Science Skills Academy beyond its original City Region Deal funding package for an additional 9 months - to enable it to meet/demonstrate outcomes (that otherwise got delayed due to Covid 19 pandemic).

It is proposed that part of the UKSPF skills funding (up to £200k to be confirmed) is used to support the delivery of Five Star skills training for Inverness Castle for its opening in 2025. The proposal is to extend the offering to other attractions in the Highlands leading to a step-change in quality.

Challenge Fund - Skills

UKSPF skills funding will be aimed towards new training that fill gaps/add value. Given the finite funds available (by value and timeframe) it is considered that a Challenge Fund is the best means by which to identify and meet real business needs.

It is proposed to have a two phased Challenge Fund – with Phase 1 giving focus to Green Skills and Phase 2 introducing more flexibility, as required, to ensure full utilisation of UKSPF.

Challenge Fund – Training Infrastructure

The UKSPF skills funding package, has a capital allocation and it is proposed that this allocation is made available for investment in training facilities, be that for expansion of existing or new facility investment to enable skills provision to be provided for in Highland that otherwise is not currently available.

Process

Applicants for funding will be first invited to submit an expression of interest form, thereby enabling discussion, short-leet and best fit, before full application details sought.

Challenge Fund available for training facility investment, planned at latest by end March 2024, thereby ensuring that associated training provision can commence and be complete by end December 2024.

Business beneficiary must be Highland based and operational and a micro business able to demonstrate that no other existing skills funding is available for the training purpose sought. Commitment to key elements of criteria e.g., Fair Work: Real Living Wage / Employee Voice should be introduced with accredited training;

Training providers coming forward with companies in the lead must be Highland based or establishing a facility in Highland. By exception only e.g., due to specialist nature of training or facilities will grant funding be used to access training with providers out with Highland.

Grant Funding Conditions

It is proposed that a maximum grant per individual business is set. This approach, rather than a maximum grant award, thereby enables rather than discourages applications for multi business applications.

Businesses will be expected to contribute to the costs of the training or support provided. This percentage will be informed by national norms and subsidy control considerations.

Training providers will be expected to contribute to any facilities investment. This percentage will be informed by subsidy control considerations.

Applicants will be encouraged and expected to endorse Fair Work and Real Living Wage criterion.