



UK Shared Prosperity Fund

Investment Plan Drafting Template

Version 3
July 2022

Your location

To be eligible for funding, you will need to be applying on behalf of a lead authority in one of the [delivery geographies](#).

Select the lead authority

For Scotland and Wales only: Who else is this investment plan being submitted on behalf of? Select all that apply

Your details

Name

Email address

Phone number

Organisation name

Local challenges and opportunities

In this section, we will ask you:

- If you've identified any challenges or opportunities, you intend to support
- Which of the UKSPF investment priorities these fall under

ARE THERE ANY LOCAL CHALLENGES YOU FACE WHICH FALL UNDER THE COMMUNITIES AND PLACE INVESTMENT PRIORITY?

(If yes) Describe these challenges, give evidence where possible

Ashford is a rapidly-growing borough with a strong record of investment in economic and community development and ambitious plans for the future. In the two decades to 2020, our population increased by 29% to 132,000 – double the UK rate of growth – and this strong growth will continue over the next twenty years. This has been accompanied by the expansion of the town of Ashford and by substantial infrastructure investment, including in high-speed rail services to London. However, the borough is also extensively rural, including the market town of Tenterden, a network of villages and parts of the Kent Downs and High Weald Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty as well as the Romney Marsh.

Our overall ambition to 2030 and beyond, set out in the Borough Council's Corporate Plan, is *"to be a thriving, productive and inclusive borough; a vital part of Kent and the South East where local businesses, social enterprises, communities and the public sector provide collective leadership to promote shared prosperity, happiness and wellbeing"*.

This ambition underpins our approach to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and to the analysis set out in this Local Investment Plan.

In developing this Local Investment Plan, we have focused on three key challenges relating to the Communities and Place priority: delivering a 'town centre reset'; supporting healthy and resilient communities; and ensuring that everyone benefits from growth.

Challenge 1: Delivering a town centre reset

Like many town centres, Ashford has been impacted in recent years by changing retail patterns, including the loss of several multiples. These trends were reinforced by the Covid-

19 pandemic and are likely to be permanent. However, Ashford is an important regional centre and the focal point for much economic and community life – and in the context of rapid population growth, it is vital that it evolves to meet the changing needs of existing and new residents, and to continue to attract commercial investment.

In 2020, the Council adopted its *Town Centre Reset* strategy, which seeks to focus resources on a defined ‘investment corridor’ within the traditional town centre, identifying opportunities for new residential development, a more diverse cultural and leisure offer, better accessibility and improved green and public spaces. This builds on recent investment (such as the Elwick Place leisure and restaurant development and Ashford Commercial Quarter) and includes the planned redevelopment of the Park Mall shopping centre in the heart of the town.

Elsewhere in the Borough, Tenterden is an important centre for local services, as well as a retail offer which also serves a visitor market. It is a distinctive, attractive and historic town and a key part of Kent’s visitor economy: our challenge is to maintain and enhance its unique character and sense of place to meet the needs of residents and visitors alike.

Challenge 2: Supporting healthy and resilient communities

Ashford faces some specific public health challenges. While life expectancy overall is actually slightly higher in Ashford than in England overall, the Kent Public Health Observatory highlights important lifestyle-related issues. For example, the percentage of adults classified as overweight or obese (65%) is higher than the England average (63%) and smoking prevalence is also higher than in England or the South East as a whole¹. Within the Borough, health inequalities are also spatially concentrated, especially in parts of urban Ashford.

In recent years, significant efforts have been made to improve public health outcomes, for example through the One You shop in Ashford town centre, which offers a range of programmes to support people to stop smoking, reach a healthy weight and increase activity, alongside access to wider community services. But there is more that can be done to expand these services and increase their reach in the community.

Challenge 3: Ensuring that everyone benefits from growth

Alongside our support for healthier, more resilient communities, we also need to address local concentrations of disadvantage. On the whole, deprivation is not especially high in Ashford. But as in many districts, this disguises local concentrations of disadvantage. For example, parts of Stanhope (in the southern part of urban Ashford) are among the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods in England, a position which correlates with the poor health outcomes highlighted above and is linked with relatively high levels of economic inactivity².

While targeted skills and employment measures (such as those supported through the People and Skills UKSPF priority) are important, addressing the challenge of concentrated disadvantage demands action across a wider front, to support community development, health and wellbeing, community safety and physical and digital access to services.

ARE THERE ANY LOCAL OPPORTUNITIES UNDER THE COMMUNITIES AND PLACE INVESTMENT PRIORITY THAT YOU INTEND TO SUPPORT?

¹ Kent Public Health Observatory/ Ashford Borough Council Corporate Plan (2022)

² IMD, 2019

(If yes) Describe these opportunities, give evidence where possible

Alongside the challenges set out above, there are three strategic opportunities that we intend to support:

Opportunity 1: Capitalising on Ashford's growth

Between 2020 and 2040, Ashford's population is forecast to expand by 29% (equivalent to an additional 37,000 people)³. While some of this is accounted for by an ageing population as people live longer, we will also see around 22% growth in the 16-64 age group. As the town grows, we will become an increasingly dynamic and diverse community, and as we develop new communities, such as the South Ashford Garden Community, we have an opportunity to embed sustainability and healthier lifestyles by design.

We want to build on this positive growth, which will help to drive demand in our town centre (helping to address the 'town centre reset' challenge highlighted earlier) and which will support a wider range of community services. We also want to focus the UK Shared Prosperity Fund on activities and services which will complement growth and bring communities together.

Opportunity 2: Capitalising on our distinctiveness and quality of life

Alongside our rapid planned growth, our natural environment is a distinctive asset. Much of the borough is within the Kent Downs and High Weald Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and our landscapes support a growing high-quality food and drink sector and significant tourism opportunities (see our priorities under Supporting Local Business for more detail). We want to ensure that these contribute to Ashford's 'sense of place' and distinctiveness as our communities grow.

Opportunity 3: Building on strong partnerships

We have been successful in recent years in building strong and effective partnerships with a range of stakeholders. This includes those organisations represented on our Local Partnership Group (described further in the 'Approach to Delivery and Governance' section), as well as businesses and community organisations and strategic partners in Health and in Kent County Council.

These offer a strong platform on which we can deliver further activity. In particular, where we are already working in partnership to deliver successful activity (such as in relation to the One You community health facility in Ashford town centre), we want to expand on existing joint working and the community relationships we have established.

Through UKSPF, we also have an opportunity to make sure that activity at a community level complements the big opportunities that are coming forward in the Borough. Within Ashford's Corporate Plan, we have identified six 'strategic projects' that will make a vital difference to long-term growth and prosperity – some of them focused on major physical development in the town centre. Alongside our work in involving business and the local community in bringing these forward, we have an opportunity through UKSPF to deliver practical improvements in the shorter term, adding value to our long-term goals and demonstrating early progress.

³ Kent County Council, Housing Led Forecasts

ARE THERE ANY LOCAL CHALLENGES YOU FACE WHICH FALL UNDER THE SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESS INVESTMENT PRIORITY?

(If yes) Describe these challenges, give evidence where possible

There are around 6,600 businesses in Ashford. Consistent with the borough's population growth, the business stock has steadily increased over the past decade: between 2011 and 2021, our business base grew by around 30%⁴. Some 92% of businesses employ fewer than ten people, and we have a sectorally diverse, principally service-oriented economy. Our overall goal is to ensure that we have *"a thriving, productive local economy supporting a range of businesses and industries, offering good work to local people and recognised as a high quality visitor destination"*.

At strategic level, key challenges that we face include our relatively weak productivity and below-average earnings⁵, and the need for our SME-based economy to respond to the pressures (and opportunities) of digitalisation and decarbonisation. In support of these aims, the Borough Council (with partners at Kent County Council, Locate in Kent, Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce and others) plays an active role in attracting new investment into the Borough – with a significant recent success in the decision by Brompton to locate a major new manufacturing and R&D centre in Ashford. Together, we also offer a range of support programmes for business.

In developing this Local Investment Plan, we aim to focus UKSPF on two specific challenges that are complementary to our wider business development strategy and the priorities contained within our Corporate Plan:

Challenge 1: Supporting the resilience and productivity of our 'food and drink' and visitor economy

Linked with Communities and Place priority, we want to promote Ashford's distinctiveness and quality of life. A key part of this is our network of food and drink producers (including those associated with the Borough's growing wine industry) and their close links with the visitor economy. Often rurally-based, our food and drink businesses make an important contribution to our sense of place – and they also have strong growth potential as demand for distinctive, sustainable, locally 'traceable' goods rises.

There are about 400 hospitality businesses and food and beverage producers in Ashford (the great majority of them micro businesses⁷), and our tourism sector supports about 4.7 million visitors to the Borough each year, pre-Covid-19⁸. Despite the opportunities for growth at the interface of hospitality and food and drink, there are three challenges:

- First, much tourism activity is seasonal, and in Ashford, it is largely dependent on day visitors (which account for about 90% of the total). We want the opportunity spread across the year, and encourage a higher-value market, consistent with the quality of the product.
- Second, while much of the focus on raising productivity in the economy overall focuses on those sectors which offer higher gross value added per job, there is evidence that there is scope for productivity gain in every sector – with hospitality able to gain through

⁴ UK Business Count

⁵ Nominal (smoothed) GVA (B) per filled job

⁶ Full-time workplace earnings are 93% of the Great Britain average (although resident earnings are higher, at 97%) ONS, Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, 2021

⁷ ONS, UK Business Count

⁸ Visit Kent, Ashford Tourism Economic Impact Study 2020

(for example) improved use of digital systems. We want to encourage this, especially given current labour shortage challenges.

- Third, the food and drink and tourism offer can benefit from shared promotion and development: the quality of the place and the connections between different parts of the offer are fundamental. So there is a strong case for shared action.

Challenge 2: Developing a stronger social enterprise base

Within the Communities and Place priority, we set out the need to invest in healthy, resilient communities and to ensure that everyone benefits from growth. Social enterprise will be an important part of this, enabling sustainable and entrepreneurial responses to community need.

Social enterprises are highlighted as key contributors to the 'Ashford Ambition' (see the reference under Communities and Place). But they often require specific and specialist business support, which recognises their wider social (as well as commercial) ambitions and supports their growth as (potential) anchor institutions within the community⁹. Over time, a strong network of community-led businesses will be important to Ashford as it grows and develops.

In identifying both of these challenges, we have taken a targeted approach, focusing specifically on the difference that UKSPF can make, alongside the other initiatives and sources of funding that we have underway.

ARE THERE ANY LOCAL OPPORTUNITIES UNDER THE SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESS INVESTMENT PRIORITY THAT YOU INTEND TO SUPPORT?

(If yes) Describe these opportunities, give evidence where possible

Within the context of these challenges, Ashford enjoys some specific opportunities. As well as rapid growth in the overall business stock and a strong record of attracting inward investment, these include two opportunities that are specifically relevant to UKSPF:

Opportunity 1: Quality of 'place and provenance'

The food and drink and visitor economy described above exists in the context of a highly valued natural landscape and a local produce offer that is strongly 'place-based' and has some locally-distinctive attributes (such as the recent growth in viticulture). This presents us with two opportunities: first to develop the sector building on existing strengths; and second, to develop a sustainable rural economy alongside our wider growth potential.

In discussing proposals for this Local Investment Plan, the Local Partnership Group identified 'place and provenance' as a theme that will run through our activities.

Opportunity 2: Links to wider activity

Within a growing economy, Ashford's Corporate Plan commits us to strengthening supply chain links between local SMEs and between local firms and major investors. There is an opportunity to support this through our focus on the food and drink economy and social enterprise.

More broadly, there should be 'spillover' opportunities to other sectors. For example, the promotion of Ashford's food and visitor offer should reinforce the promotion of the Borough

⁹ University of Bath (2019), *Barriers to Social Enterprise Growth*

to wider investors, and there ought to be a strong alignment between the visitor economy and the growth of Ashford's growing creative industry sector.

As set out above, we recognise that funding through UKSPF will be relatively limited. We anticipate that our focus through the Supporting Local Business Investment priority will be on these sectoral opportunities, especially in relation to the social economy and visitor economy in the first instance.

ARE THERE ANY LOCAL CHALLENGES YOU FACE WHICH FALL UNDER THE PEOPLE AND SKILLS INVESTMENT PRIORITY? (In Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland this should also include challenges relating to Multiply)

(If yes) Describe these challenges, give evidence where possible

In common with the rest of Kent, Ashford has a significant skills challenge. While the data is volatile at local level, there are consistently more people of working age without formal qualifications in Ashford than the national or regional averages, and only around 35% of the Borough's workforce is qualified to Level 4 or above, compared with a national rate of around 45%¹⁰.

Despite this qualifications deficit, the economic activity rate is in line with the rest of the country, and the claimant count is actually slightly lower than the national average. But a relatively weak workforce skills profile presents a challenge for long-term economic resilience. It is also a barrier to overcoming Ashford's (and East Kent's) productivity gap with the rest of the UK.

Recent work carried out as part of the Kent and Medway Local Skills Improvement Plan highlighted widespread reported skills and labour imbalances, partly due to poor 'demand-side' information (i.e., a lack of knowledge about opportunities and skills requirements in some sectors) and actual and perceived 'work readiness' challenges, which are likely to be greatest among those who are most distant from the labour market. As cited elsewhere, barriers to employment are spatially concentrated within Ashford, and overlap with wider health and wellbeing challenges. As part of our overall strategy, our interventions in support of 'Community and Place' ought to have positive impacts on the 'People and Skills' priority.

ARE THERE ANY LOCAL OPPORTUNITIES UNDER THE PEOPLE AND SKILLS INVESTMENT PRIORITY THAT YOU INTEND TO SUPPORT? (In Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland this should also include challenges relating to Multiply)

(If yes) Describe these opportunities, give evidence where possible

Key opportunities include recent investment in Ashford's **further education** infrastructure, with the opening of Ashford College in 2017, its subsequent integration into the EKC Group and the development of an increasingly collaborative further education college network across Kent.

More specifically, there are opportunities to **build on existing provision**, including support for people furthest from the labour market currently supported by ESF, and through the expansion of family learning support and community-based approaches to encourage access to learning and work. Linked with the outcomes of the Local Skills Improvement Plan, there are also opportunities to encourage greater access to short courses, especially where these are linked with employer demand.

¹⁰ ONS, Annual Population Survey, three year average

There are opportunities within this priority to work in collaboration with neighbouring authorities. The skills and access to employment challenges that Ashford faces are similar to those in the rest of East Kent, and our travel to work and travel to learn markets extend beyond the borough boundaries. We also work closely with local providers covering a wider spatial footprint – for example, EKC Group – and there are opportunities to deliver activity across several districts to achieve maximum impact.

Interventions

In this section, we will ask you about:

- Interventions you've chosen for each year of funding
- Outcomes you want to deliver
- Any interventions that are not listed here
- How these interventions fall under the UKSPF investment priorities, and your rationale for them
- Interventions not included in our list will be assessed before being approved, where you will need to show a clear rationale, how the intervention is value for money, what outcomes it will deliver and how you will monitor and evaluate the intervention. This may include a theory of change or logic chain.

WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES YOU WANT TO DELIVER UNDER THE COMMUNITIES AND PLACE INVESTMENT PRIORITY? SELECT ALL THAT APPLY.

Outcome	Tick if applicable
Jobs created	✓
Jobs safeguarded	
Increased footfall	✓
Increased visitor numbers	
Reduced vacancy rates	✓
Greenhouse gas reductions	
Improved perceived/experienced accessibility	
Improved perception of facilities/amenities	✓
Increased number of properties better protected from flooding and coastal erosion	
Increased users of facilities / amenities	✓
Improved perception of facility/infrastructure project	
Increased use of cycleways or paths	
Increase in Biodiversity	
Increased affordability of events/entry	
Improved perception of safety	
Reduction in neighbourhood crime	
Improved engagement numbers	
Improved perception of events	
Increased number of web searches for a place	
Volunteering numbers as a result of support	✓
Number of community-led arts, cultural, heritage and creative programmes as a result of support	✓
Increased take up of energy efficiency measures	
Increased number of projects arising from funded feasibility studies	
Number of premises with improved digital connectivity	
None of the above	

SELECT THE INTERVENTIONS YOU INTEND TO USE WHICH MEET THE COMMUNITIES AND PLACE INVESTMENT PRIORITY. YOU CAN SELECT AS MANY AS YOU LIKE.

Intervention

A full list of nation-specific interventions is available in the relevant annex to the Prospectus.

E1. Funding for improvements to town centres and high streets, including better accessibility for disabled people, including capital and running costs

E2. Community and neighbourhood infrastructure projects

E6. Local arts, cultural, heritage and creative activities

E9: Funding for impactful volunteering and/ or social action projects to develop social and human capital in local places

DO YOU PLAN TO USE ANY INTERVENTIONS NOT INCLUDED IN THE COMMUNITIES AND PLACE LIST?

State the name of each of these additional interventions and a brief description of each of these

No

Explain how each intervention meets the Communities and Place investment priority. Give evidence where possible, including why it is value money and the outcomes you want to deliver.

Not applicable

Do you consider that any of these interventions may provide a subsidy to potential recipients of the funding under the intervention's planned activity?

All bids must also consider how they will deliver in line with subsidy control as [set out in the guidance](#).

No

Detail the assessment you undertook to consider whether the intervention is a subsidy and any specific measures you will take to make sure the subsidy is permitted.

Not applicable

HAVE YOU ALREADY IDENTIFIED ANY PROJECTS WHICH FALL UNDER THE COMMUNITIES AND PLACE INVESTMENT PRIORITY?

Describe these projects, including how they fall under the Communities and Place investment priority and the location of the proposed project.

Yes.

Background

In developing this Local Investment Plan, we reviewed existing policy documents, especially the Ashford Borough Council Corporate Plan, to identify priority areas for intervention. In parallel, we launched a call for informal expressions of interest, to engage wider stakeholders in coming forward with ideas. These were subsequently reviewed and discussed with Ashford's Local Partnership Group.

As a result of this process, the Local Partnership Group identified four themes for the use of UKSPF, which link with the analysis of need and opportunity that we set out in the first section of this Plan. These themes are:

- Town Centre Reset: Investing in our town centres as focal points for commercial, civic and community activity for our growing communities.

- **Healthy, Resilient Communities:** Supporting stronger communities with a focus on the Borough's significant health inequalities
- **Place and Provenance:** Capitalising on Ashford's distinctiveness, with a focus on the links between its food and drink offer, natural environment and sense of place
- **Employment Access and Progression:** Supporting into work and helping them progress in work.

These themes were then mapped against the three UKSPF priorities.

In considering potential projects, the Local Partnership Group took into account the scale of UKSPF funding available, relevance to the UKSPF priorities and Ashford's identified themes, and ability to spend within the UKSPF funding period. It should be noted that at this stage, no projects have been committed, so the potential projects set out below should be regarded as indicative.

Potential projects within the Communities and Place priority

We have identified eight projects within this priority:

Town Centre Reset

In Ashford Town Centre, we have identified seven projects, which will contribute to the wider Ashford Town Centre Reset programme. These are:

- **Hello Lamppost:** A new way of providing digitally-accessible information about events and activities taking place in the town centre through QR codes at key locations
- **Town Centre Play:** Temporary play facilities to improve the town centre's attractiveness and accessibility to families
- **Mural Festival:** Involving the community in public art and brightening key points in the town
- **Accessibility Study:** Feasibility study to investigate how the town centre can be made more accessible for people with disabilities

In Tenterden Town Centre, we have identified a further project, which is:

- **Tenterden Sound Museum:** Creative re-use of three traditional telephone boxes for 'micro' gallery and museum use – supporting public engagement in heritage and culture and developing Tenterden's distinctive visitor economy offer.

Healthy, Resilient Communities

Three projects will support healthy and resilient communities:

- **One You Shop:** The One You Shop in Ashford town centre offers a range of services supporting healthier lifestyles in an easily-accessible setting. This project will expand the facility (reducing town centre vacancy rates as well as delivering more services) and will expand its outreach into the community. Location: Ashford town centre.
- **Charlton Athletic Community Trust:** This project seeks to offer positive activities to young people as part of a crime reduction strategy. These activities include sports sessions, one-to-one mentoring, residential activities and crime reduction workshops. Location: Borough-wide.
- **Community Amenities Grants:** Support for improvements to community centres (and the establishment of new facilities), especially in more disadvantaged parts of the Borough. Location: Borough-wide.

Delivery partners may include Ashford Borough Council, Charlton Athletic Community Trust, Kent Community Health Foundation NHS Trust, Kent County Council, Tenterden Town Council, and community organisations.

Do you consider these projects may provide a subsidy to potential recipients of the funding under the proposed planned activity?

All bids must also consider how they will deliver in line with subsidy control as [set out in the guidance](#).

Yes	No
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Detail the assessment you undertook to consider whether the proposed projects constitute a subsidy and any specific measures you will take to make sure the subsidy is permitted.

The Government sets out five ‘characteristics’ of public support, all of which must be met for the support to constitute a subsidy. These are:

- Is the support **provided by a ‘public authority’** and does the support constitute a financial (or in kind) contribution such as a grant, loan or guarantee?
Yes – In all cases, support is from Government.
- Does the support measure **confer an economic advantage** on one or more economic actors?
Potentially (for example, there may be benefits to town centre businesses as a result of investment in the Town Centre Reset projects).
- Is the support measure **specific** insofar as it benefits, as a matter of law or fact, certain economic actors over others in relation to the production of certain goods or services?
Potentially (for example, the outcomes delivered by the Charlton Athletic Community Trust project could potentially be delivered by another organisation)
- Does the support measure have the potential to cause a distortion in or harm to competition, trade or investment?
No. There are no implications for trade or investment and the amounts involved at individual project level are minimal.

We therefore do not consider that any of the indicative projects proposed constitute a subsidy.

In line with guidance published by Government, we will ensure that all third party recipients of funding will be required to set out how proposed projects will be delivered in line with subsidy control guidance, and we will assess all projects for subsidy control risk (drawing on the recipient’s wider responses as well as their confirmation of compliance). Where an application presents an unacceptable risk of non-compliant delivery, we may choose to either reject it, or require adjustments to be made such that funding the project will not contravene subsidy control.

We also note that the Council will be required to record and submit information on any UKSPF subsidies awarded. This includes how the terms of any award meet the appropriate subsidy control requirements, and how they are delivered, using the recommended BEIS transparency database.

WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES YOU WANT TO DELIVER UNDER THE SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESS INVESTMENT PRIORITY? SELECT ALL THAT APPLY.

Outcome	Tick if applicable
Jobs created	✓
Jobs safeguarded	
Increased footfall	
Increased visitor numbers	✓
Reduced vacancy rates	
Greenhouse gas reductions	
Number of new businesses created	✓
Improved perception of markets	
Increased business sustainability	
Increased number of businesses supported	

Increased amount of investment	✓
Improved perception of attractions	
Number of businesses introducing new products to the firm	
Number of organisations engaged in new knowledge transfer activity	
Number of premises with improved digital connectivity	
Number of businesses adopting new to the firm technologies or processes	
Number of new to market products	
Number of R&D active businesses	
Increased number of innovation active SMEs	
Number of businesses adopting new or improved products or services	
Increased number of innovation plans developed	
Number of early stage firms which increase their revenue following support	
Number of businesses engaged in new markets	
Number of businesses engaged in new markets	✓
Number of businesses increasing their export capability	
Increased amount of low or zero carbon energy infrastructure installed	
Number of businesses with improved productivity	
Increased number of projects arising from funded feasibility studies	
Increased number of properties better protected from flooding and coastal erosion	
None of the above	

SELECT THE INTERVENTIONS YOU INTEND TO USE WHICH MEET THE SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESS INVESTMENT PRIORITY. YOU CAN SELECT AS MANY AS YOU LIKE.

Intervention

A full list of nation-specific interventions is available in the relevant annex to the Prospectus.

E17: Funding for development and promotion (both trade and consumer) of the visitor economy, such as local attractions, trails, tours and tourism products more generally

E26: Support for growing the local social economy, including community businesses, cooperatives and social enterprises

DO YOU PLAN TO USE ANY INTERVENTIONS NOT INCLUDED IN THE SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESS LIST?

State the name of each of these additional interventions and a brief description of each of these

N/A

Explain how each intervention meets the Supporting Local Business investment priority. Give evidence where possible, including why it is value money and the outcomes you want to deliver.

N/A

Do you consider that any of these interventions may provide a subsidy to potential recipients of the funding under the intervention's planned activity?

All bids must also consider how they will deliver in line with subsidy control as [set out in the guidance](#).

Yes

No

Detail the assessment you undertook to consider whether the intervention is a subsidy and any specific measures you will take to make sure the subsidy is permitted.

N/A

HAVE YOU ALREADY IDENTIFIED ANY PROJECTS WHICH FALL UNDER THE SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESS INVESTMENT PRIORITY?

Describe these projects, including how they fall under the Supporting Local Business investment priority and the location of the proposed project.

Yes.

Background

In developing this Local Investment Plan, we reviewed existing policy documents, especially the Ashford Borough Council Corporate Plan, to identify priority areas for intervention. In parallel, we launched a call for informal expressions of interest, to engage wider stakeholders in coming forward with ideas. These were subsequently reviewed and discussed with Ashford's Local Partnership Group.

As a result of this process, the Local Partnership Group identified four themes for the use of UKSPF, which link with the analysis of need and opportunity that we set out in the first section of this Plan. These themes are:

- Town Centre Reset: Investing in our town centres as focal points for commercial, civic and community activity for our growing communities.
- Healthy, Resilient Communities: Supporting stronger communities with a focus on the Borough's significant health inequalities
- Place and Provenance: Capitalising on Ashford's distinctiveness, with a focus on the links between its food and drink offer, natural environment and sense of place
- Employment Access and Progression: Supporting into work and helping them progress in work.

These themes were then mapped against the three UKSPF priorities.

In considering potential projects, the Local Partnership Group took into account the scale of UKSPF funding available, relevance to the UKSPF priorities and Ashford's identified themes, and ability to spend within the UKSPF funding period.

As a result of this process, we concluded that a focused approach would be appropriate to the Supporting Local Business priority, concentrating especially on the visitor economy, food and drink sector and social enterprise. This recognises that interventions to support these sectors are most likely to be relevant at local level and deliverable within the amount of UKSPF funding available.

It should be noted that at this stage, no projects have been committed, so the potential projects set out below should be regarded as indicative.

Potential projects within the Supporting Local Business priority

We have identified two projects within this priority:

Healthy, Resilient Communities

- Building the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector: This project seeks to provide infrastructure support to the voluntary and community sector in Ashford (capacity building, advice and business support, assistance in accessing grant funding, social enterprise development, etc.), with the aim of expanding its resilience in the context of rapid population growth. Location: Borough-wide.

Place and Provenance

- Targeted support to the visitor economy and Ashford's food and drink offer (for example, promotional activity and rural food and drink trails). Location: Borough-wide.

Delivery partners may include Ashford Borough Council, Ashford Volunteer Centre, Produced in Kent, Social Enterprise Kent, Visit Kent and business and voluntary/ community organisations.

Do you consider these projects may provide a subsidy to potential recipients of the funding under the proposed planned activity?

All bids must also consider how they will deliver in line with subsidy control as [set out in the guidance](#).

Yes

No

Detail the assessment you undertook to consider whether the proposed projects constitute a subsidy and any specific measures you will take to make sure the subsidy is permitted.

The Government sets out five 'characteristics' of public support, all of which must be met for the support to constitute a subsidy. These are:

- Is the support **provided by a 'public authority'** and does the support constitute a financial (or in kind) contribution such as a grant, loan or guarantee?
Yes – In all cases, support is from Government.
- Does the support measure **confer an economic advantage** on one or more economic actors? Potentially, although only on a marginal scale (for example, there may be benefits to visitor economy businesses through the projects supported).
- Is the support measure **specific** insofar as it benefits, as a matter of law or fact, certain economic actors over others in relation to the production of certain goods or services?
No. We do not anticipate direct grants or subsidies to businesses, and support will be competitively procured.
- Does the support measure have the potential to cause a **distortion in or harm to competition**, trade or investment?
No. There are no implications for trade or investment and the amounts involved at individual project level are minimal.

We therefore do not consider that any of the indicative projects proposed constitute a subsidy.

WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES YOU WANT TO DELIVER UNDER THE PEOPLE AND SKILLS INVESTMENT PRIORITY? SELECT ALL THAT APPLY.

Outcome	Tick if applicable
Number of economically inactive individuals in receipt of benefits they are entitled to following support	✓
Increased active or sustained participants of UKSPF beneficiaries in community groups [and/or] increased employability through development of interpersonal skills	✓
Increased proportion of participants with basic skills (English, maths, digital and ESOL)	✓
Number of people in supported employment [and] number of people engaging with mainstream healthcare services	✓
Number of people sustaining engagement with keyworker support and additional services	
Number of people engaged in job-searching following support	✓
Number of people in employment, including self-employment, following support	✓
Number of people sustaining employment for 6 months	✓

Increased employment, skills and/or UKSPF objectives incorporated into local area corporate governance	✓
Number of people in education/training	✓
Increased number of people with basic skills (English, maths, digital and ESOL)	✓
Fewer people facing structural barriers into employment and into skills provision	✓
Increased number of people familiarised with employers' expectations, including, standards of behaviour in the workplace	✓
Fewer people facing structural barriers into employment and into skills provision	✓
Number of people gaining a qualification or completing a course following support	✓
Number of people gaining qualifications, licences, and skills	✓
Number of economically active individuals engaged in mainstream skills education, and training.	✓
Number of people engaged in life skills support following interventions	✓
Number of people with proficiency in pre-employment and interpersonal skills (relationship, organisational and anger-management, interviewing, CV and job application writing)	✓
Multiply only - Increased number of adults achieving maths qualifications up to, and including, Level 2.	
Multiply only - Increased number of adults participating in maths qualifications and courses up to, and including, Level 2.	
None of the above	

SELECT THE INTERVENTIONS YOU INTEND TO USE WHICH MEET THE PEOPLE AND SKILLS INVESTMENT PRIORITY. YOU CAN SELECT AS MANY AS YOU LIKE.

Intervention

A full list of nation-specific interventions is available in the relevant annex to the Prospectus.

E33: Employment support for economically inactive people: Intensive and wrap-around one-to-one support to move people closer towards mainstream provision and employment, supplemented by additional and/or specialist life and basic skills (digital, English, maths* and ESOL) support where there are local provision gaps

E34: Courses including basic skills (digital, English, maths (via Multiply) and ESOL), and life skills and career skills provision for people who are unable to access training through the adult education budget or wrap around support detailed above. Supplemented by financial support for learners to enrol onto courses and complete qualifications

E35: Activities such as enrichment and volunteering to improve opportunities and promote wellbeing

E38: Support for local areas to fund specific local skills needs

DO YOU PLAN TO USE ANY INTERVENTIONS NOT INCLUDED IN THE PEOPLE AND SKILLS LIST?

State the name of each of these additional interventions and a brief description of each of these

N/A

Explain how each intervention meets the People and Skills investment priority. Give evidence where possible, including why it is value money and the outcomes you want to deliver.

N/A

Do you consider that any of these interventions may provide a subsidy to potential recipients of the funding under the intervention's planned activity?
All bids must also consider how they will deliver in line with subsidy control as [set out in the guidance](#).

Yes No

Detail the assessment you undertook to consider whether the intervention is a subsidy and any specific measures you will take to make sure the subsidy is permitted.

N/A

ENGLAND ONLY: People and Skills interventions can only be used in 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 if you have identified a local voluntary and community provision, previously supported by the European Social Fund, at risk of closure. If you have not identified a suitable provision, you will not be able to select interventions for 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 and your investment plan will not be approved.

HAVE YOU ALREADY IDENTIFIED ANY PROJECTS for 2024-2025 WHICH FALL UNDER THE PEOPLE AND SKILLS INVESTMENT PRIORITY?

Yes, at indicative level.

Please note that we have not identified a ESF-funded provision at risk of closure, and we are therefore not proposing any interventions in 2022/23 or 2023/24.

Describe the projects for 2024-25, including how they fall under the People and Skills investment priority and the location of the proposed project.

We anticipate potential for a package of activities that might include taster courses, ESOL provision, family learning and support for adults furthest away from the labour market to overcome barriers to accessing employment. This may be progressed in collaboration with the other East Kent local authorities, recognising potential economies of scale, travel-to-learn and travel-to-work geographies and the common issues shared across the authorities.

At this stage, these discussions are at an early stage. We anticipate that proposals will be refined further over the coming months, taking account of any further guidance from Government. We have engaged with EKC Group (the main local further education provider), but all proposals will be subject to a competitive process.

Do you consider these projects may provide a subsidy to potential recipients of the funding under the proposed planned activity?
All bids must also consider how they will deliver in line with subsidy control as [set out in the guidance](#).

Yes No

Detail the assessment you undertook to consider whether the proposed projects constitute a subsidy and any specific measures you will take to make sure the subsidy is permitted.

We note that there are several providers currently engaged in ESF-funded provision and there is a market for employment support services. As project proposals are developed further, we will ensure that all contracts are procured through a competitive process, whether this is managed directly by Ashford Borough Council itself, or in collaboration with neighbouring districts.

HAVE YOU IDENTIFIED A LOCAL VOLUNTARY PROVISION AT RISK AS PART OF YOUR PEOPLE AND SKILLS INVESTMENT PRIORITIES?

Yes No

(If Yes) Describe the local voluntary provision at risk and your rationale for supporting it.

N/A

Provide the European Social Fund Project Names and Project References for this voluntary and community provision at risk.

N/A		
What year do you intend to fund these projects? Select all that apply.		
2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
Describe the projects for 2022-2023 and 2023-2024, including how they fall under the People and Skills investment priority and the location of the proposed project.		
N/A		
Do you consider these projects may provide a subsidy to potential recipients of the funding under the proposed planned activity? All bids must also consider how they will deliver in line with subsidy control as set out in the guidance.		
Yes	No	
Detail the assessment you undertook to consider whether the proposed projects constitute a subsidy and any specific measures you will take to make sure the subsidy is permitted.		
N/A		

SCOTLAND, WALES & NORTHERN IRELAND ONLY		
HAVE YOU ALREADY IDENTIFIED ANY PROJECTS WHICH FALL UNDER THE PEOPLE AND SKILLS INVESTMENT PRIORITY?		
Yes	No	
Describe the projects, including how they fall under the People and Skills investment priority and the location of the proposed project.		
Do you consider these projects may provide a subsidy to potential recipients of the funding under the proposed planned activity? All bids must also consider how they will deliver in line with subsidy control as set out in the guidance.		
Yes	No	
Detail the assessment you undertook to consider whether the proposed projects constitute a subsidy and any specific measures you will take to make sure the subsidy is permitted.		

Approach to delivery and governance

In this section, we will ask you about:

- Structures you have in place to support delivery
- Support you have from stakeholders and the local community
- How you've engaged with MPs as part of your investment plan
- Opportunities you have identified to work with other places

Places need to show how MPs that cover the lead local authority have been engaged on the investment plan and whether they support it. More detail on the role of MPs can be found here.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT		
Have you engaged with any of the following as part of your investment plan? Select all that apply.		
Public sector organisations X	Private sector organisations X	Civil society organisations X
Describe how you have engaged with any of these organisations. Give examples where possible.		

Background

This Local Investment Plan builds on extensive stakeholder consultation over many years. Specifically, we consulted on the development of the Ashford Ambition in 2020. This informed our new Corporate Plan for 2022-24, which was also subject to wide consultation, and which supported both the analysis of needs and opportunities set out at the start of this document and our identification of key themes for our use of UKSPF.

Direct engagement in developing this Local Investment Plan

Building on this earlier consultation, officers emailed stakeholders who supported the council in developing the Corporate Plan 2022-2024 by attending workshops and providing comments. This email was sent on 29 April 2022 and detailed Ashford Borough Council's approach to drafting the Local Investment Plan. If recipients had comments or potential project ideas, officers requested these be emailed by 27 May 2022.

The council drafted an Expression of Interest template which was sent to any interested party for UKSPF. Enquiries were received by officers across the council from a range of organisations. While officers initially requested that the completed templates be submitted no later than 27 May 2022 to allow the council to shape the Local Investment Plan, we have considered ideas submitted subsequently. As set out earlier, no commitment has been given to funding any specific project at this stage: the aim has been to secure a wide range of ideas, both from within the Council and among community and business partners.

Local Partnership Group

Ashford Borough Council identified key stakeholders to form the Local Partnership Group, which met for the first time on 17 June 2022. This included the local MP, representatives from Ashford Borough Council, the Community Safety Partnership, EKC Group (the regional further education college group) and Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce.

Representatives from several voluntary and community organisations were also invited but were unable to attend this initial meeting. However, they have agreed to attend future meetings.

Summarise the governance structures you have in place, including how any advisory panels or associated partnership groups are made up

Our governance arrangements involve established processes for decision-making and scrutiny within Ashford Borough Council, as well as advice and oversight from external partners.

Internal governance

Ashford Borough Council will be responsible for ensuring the appropriate distribution of funds and monitoring and reporting as required. Specifically:

- Programme management will be delivered through the Economic Development Team at Ashford Borough Council (see further details of team capacity below). This will involve supporting the Local Partnership Group, ensuring that the Council's procurement regulations are followed, monitoring delivery and reporting to DLUHC as required.
- Decision-making on the allocation of funds will be made through the Council's standard processes, following the framework set out in this Local Investment Plan and following the advice of the Local Partnership Group.
- Quarterly reports on performance, including outputs achieved and expected and spend, will be reported to Members and senior officers within the Council, as well as the Local Partnership Group.

Local Partnership Group

The Local Partnership Group will consist of representatives from: Ashford Borough Council; Ashford Community Safety Partnership; Ashford Volunteer Centre; EKC Group; and Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce; as well as Damian Green, MP for Ashford. Additional representatives may also be invited to join.

The role of the LPG is to:

- Provide strategic advice on the priorities of the UKSPF in Ashford
- Receive regular reports on progress
- Advise on allocations of funding for the year ahead
- Consider and advise on any significant variance to the priorities set out in this Local Investment Plan

As outlined above, the LPG met for the first time in June 2022 to consider and endorse the priorities set out in this Plan. The LPG will meet at least annually to advise on the allocation of funding for the forthcoming year, although it may meet more frequently as the UKSPF programme progresses.

Confirm all MPs covering your lead local authority have been invited to join the local partnership group.

Yes

No

Are there MPs who are not supportive of your investment plan?

Yes

No

(If Yes) Who are the MPs that are not supportive and outline their reasons why.

N/A

PROJECT SELECTION

Are you intending to select projects in any way other than by competition for funding?

Yes

No

(If Yes) Describe your approach to selecting projects, and why you intend to do it this way.

Project selection will be through a combination of:

- Grants to public or private organisations, in cases where there may be several organisations with different approaches to meeting outcomes. As set out above, we have identified a project need for funding to invest in community centres and facilities. This will be managed via a competitive funding process, in line with the UKSPF guidance.
- Commissioning third party organisations, in cases where there is a defined project specification (for example, in providing a support service to social enterprises). This will be carried out according to Ashford Borough Council's procurement regulations, which determine whether a competitive tender, or a specific number of quotes, is required. We have already undertaken a mapping exercise of those projects we have identified to determine the procurement route that they would need to take, based on anticipated project size.
- In-house provision, where the Council will be the project delivery organisation, either on its own or in partnership (for example in the case of the proposed extension to the One You shop in Ashford Town Centre).

As set out above, the Council has made no commitment to fund any specific projects. However, we anticipate that commissioning specifications will follow the priorities set out in this Plan.

All procurement will be carried out according to Ashford Borough Council's procurement regulations and the other regulations listed in the Government's supplementary guidance on procurement.

Describe any interventions not included in this list?	
Who are the places you intend to collaborate with?	

DO YOU INTEND TO WORK WITH OTHER PLACES ON ANY OF THE INTERVENTIONS WHICH FALL UNDER THE PEOPLE AND SKILLS INVESTMENT PRIORITY?

Which interventions do you intend to collaborate on? Select all that apply.

Intervention	Tick if applicable
<i>A full list of nation-specific interventions is available in the relevant annex to the Prospectus.</i>	
E33: Employment support for economically inactive people	X
E34: Courses including basic, life & career skills	X
E35: Enrichment & volunteering activities	X
E38: Local areas to fund local skills needs	X

Describe any interventions not included in this list?

N/A

Who are the places you intend to collaborate with?

Neighbouring local authorities in East Kent: Dover District Council, Folkestone & Hythe District Council, Thanet District Council, Canterbury City Council, Swale Borough Council; linked with the potential offer from EKC Group.

PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

How have you considered your public sector equality duty in the design of your investment plan?

An Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken for the purposes of the Local Investment Plan. An EqlA was also undertaken on Ashford Borough Council's Corporate Plan, from which the key investment themes are derived.

At programme level, the EqIA concludes that there are unlikely to be any negative impacts in relation to any Protected Characteristics. There may however be positive impacts on some group, given the focus on better access to health services and community amenities within the Plan.

More broadly, Ashford Borough Council's draft *Equality Policy 2022-24* sets out four Equalities Objectives. These are:

- Improving our understanding of our diverse communities in all that we do
- Encouraging all residents to have a say in the decisions that affect them and get involved in their local communities
- Delivering services and customer care to meet the needs of all our residents
- Delivering organisational change to enable a more inclusive and diverse workforce

The second of these is especially relevant to the Local Investment Plan, given the focus on developing community resources in more disadvantaged parts of the Borough and the strengthening of residents' voice in and access to health and other services.

How will you consider your public sector equality duty when implementing your investment plan, including in the selection of projects?

Implementation of the Investment Plan will be monitored in the light of the *Equalities Policy* by the Council, and progress will be regularly reported to the Local Partnership Group.

Each specific project funded by UKSPF will be subject to individual Equalities Impact Assessments, once the Local Investment Plan has been approved. This will apply regardless of the commissioning route. Any negative impacts will be required to be mitigated before the project proceeds.

RISKS

Have you identified any key risks that could affect delivery, for example lack of staff or expertise?

Yes	No
-----	----

(If Yes) Describe these risks or issues, including the contingency measures you have in place to mitigate them.

A Risk Assessment has been carried out on this Plan. Key risks include:

- Project cancellation following approval: Mitigated through dialogue with project promoters in advance of submission to ensure re-scoping as appropriate; and through ongoing engagement with partners and the Local Partnership Group to ensure an appropriate pipeline of alternative projects.
- Resource loss if members of staff leave or are redeployed: Mitigated through tasks dispersed across several FTE staff, enabling resilience and flexibility
- Failure to deliver required outcomes: Mitigated through project application process requiring clear definition of outputs, outcomes and milestones; and through regular and ongoing monitoring
- Inflation and price increases: As the allocation to Ashford is fixed, this risk is borne by individual projects, although it may impact on output delivery and potentially project viability. Mitigated through ongoing dialogue with project promoters and the measures outlined above to mitigate the impact of cancellation should a project prove non-viable.
- Challenges to the procurement and project selection process: Mitigated through clear adherence to Ashford Borough Council's procurement rules and processes, including competition for any third party grants
- Failure of cooperation between authorities in East Kent, especially impacting on the delivery of the People and Skills priority: Early discussion between the authorities will seek to establish common principles in the case of UKSPF, with sufficient time to determine local priorities in the event that a sub-regional approach is not possible.

All risks are identified in our Risk Assessment spreadsheet.

Have you identified any key fraud risks that could affect UKSPF delivery?

Yes

No

(If Yes) Describe these risks or issues, including the contingency measures you have in place to mitigate them.

Ashford Borough Council will distribute UKSPF funding to external organisations to deliver elements of the LIP. This carries inherent risks of fraud, and we recognise. However, we do not propose making grant funding available to individuals or as small grants to businesses: the overall amount of funding is modest and the mechanism for distributing it is conventional. The risk is therefore modest.

The council has measures in place to manage fraud prevention which will apply to any payments made under UKSPF. These include:

- Due diligence at the commissioning/ procurement stage
- Evidence requirements in the claims process
- Ongoing monitoring of spend and outputs, including site visits where appropriate.

We will follow the Guidance for General Grants in undertaking Fraud Risk Assessments on every project, subject to the level of risk. We also note the guidance on Assurance and Risk, including the role of the Chief Finance Officer as the 'first line of defence', responsible for "the delivery of HMG investment, with propriety, regularity, and value for money".

Capacity and capability

In this section, we will ask you about:

- The capacity and capability of your team to manage funding
- The resources you have in place for work related to UKSPF

Your answers here will help us know how to support you with delivery. They will not affect the amount of funding you will get.

Answer as honestly as possible.

TEAM RESOURCE

How many people (FTE) will be put in place to work with UKSPF funding?

3 Officers will work on UKSPF providing approximately 1FTE in time.

Describe what role these people will have, including any seniority and experience.

Head of Policy and Performance, Policy and Performance – senior manager with experience in public policy development and monitoring, consultation and governance. Relevant examples include: Corporate Plan 2022-2024 development and adoption, monitoring of the Corporate Plan, managing the Member Services Team.

Senior Economic Development Officer – senior officer with experience of project management, policy development, implementation and grant distribution. Relevant examples of work include: currently working on LUF for Ashford, Discretionary and ARG Grant administration, Town Centre Grants development and implementation.

In addition, we intend to recruit a further mid-level officer.

Other officers from across the council will provide ad hoc support as required during the implementation of the Plan.

- Strong capability: Has extensive experience and/or a proven track record of delivery in this area.
- Strong capacity: High degree of confidence that there is enough staffing/resource to manage funding in this area.
- Some capability: Has previous experience of delivery in this area.
- Some capacity: Confident that there is enough staffing/resource to manage funding in this area.
- Limited capability: Does not have previous experience and/or no track record of delivery in this area.
- Limited capacity: Limited confidence that there is enough staffing/resource to manage funding in this area. Additional resource may be needed to support delivery.

CAPACITY AND CAPABILITY		
How would you describe your team's current experience of delivering funding and managing growth funds?		
Very experienced	Some experience	No previous experience
How would you describe your team's current capability to manage funding for procurement?		
Strong capability	Some capability	Limited capability
How would you describe your team's current capability to manage funding for procurement?		
Strong capability	Some capability	Limited capability
How would you describe your team's current capacity to manage funding for procurement?		
Strong capacity	Some capacity	Limited capacity
How would you describe your team's current capability to manage funding for subsidies?		
Strong capability	Some capability	Limited capability
How would you describe your team's current capacity to manage funding for subsidies?		
Strong capacity	Some capacity	Limited capacity

COMMUNITIES AND PLACE CAPACITY AND CAPABILITY		
Does your local authority have any previous experience of delivering the Communities and Place interventions you have select?		
Yes	No	
How would you describe your team's current capability to manage funding for Communities and Place interventions?		
Strong capability	Some capability	Limited capability
Describe the key capability challenges (if you have any) for delivering Communities and Place interventions. This may include challenges within your local authority and/or your local/regional delivery system.		
N/A		
Describe what further support would help address these challenges.		
N/A		

How would you describe your team's current capacity to manage funding for Communities and Place interventions?		
Strong capacity	Some capacity	Limited capacity
Describe the key capacity challenges (if you have any) for delivering Communities and Place interventions. This may include challenges within your local authority and/or your local/regional delivery system.		
The Economic Development Service is currently resourcing the Town Centre Team which will provide a challenge in ensuring delivery on town centre interventions are undertaken in Year 1. However, funding through the 4% programme management allocation for UKSPF ought to help in resourcing this.		
Describe what further support would help address these challenges.		
N/A		

SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESS CAPACITY AND CAPABILITY		
Does your local authority have any previous experience of delivering the Supporting Local Business interventions you have select?		
Yes	No	
How would you describe your team's current capacity to manage funding for Supporting Local Business interventions?		
Strong capability	Some capability	Limited capability
Describe the key capability challenges (if you have any) for delivering Supporting Local Business interventions. This may include challenges within your local authority and/or your local/regional delivery system.		
N/A		
Describe what further support would help address these challenges.		
N/A		
How would you describe your team's current capacity to manage funding for Supporting Local Business interventions?		
Strong capacity	Some capacity	Limited capacity
Describe the key capacity challenges (if you have any) for delivering Supporting Local Business interventions. This may include challenges within your local authority and/or your local/regional delivery system.		
There is currently some uncertainty regarding local business support funding, given historic reliance on European funds (including, in Kent, Interreg) and current uncertainty on the future role and funding for Local Enterprise Partnerships. In the expression of interest stage, we received a large number of applications for business support-related activities: given the scale of the UKSPF pot for Ashford, it would be impossible to fund all (or most) of these, but it highlights the scale of potential demand, and the nature of the provision gaps that may emerge.		
Describe what further support would help address these challenges.		

This is a strategic challenge, rather than one relating to the operation of UKSPF specifically. But a national and sub-regional review of local business support services and their funding would help to clarify future priorities.

PEOPLE AND SKILLS CAPACITY AND CAPABILITY

Does your local authority have any previous experience of delivering the People and Skills interventions you have select?

Yes No

How would you describe your team’s current capability to manage funding for People and Skills interventions?

Strong capability Some capability Limited capability

Describe the key capability challenges (if you have any) for delivering People and Skills interventions. This may include challenges within your local authority and/or your local/regional delivery system.

Lower Tier Authorities have not normally undertaken projects or activity to target skills and access to employment. This has traditionally been an Upper Tier or Unitary or Government workstream due to its strategic nature, and we note the quasi-mainstream nature of much ESF-funded employment support.

Ashford Borough Council has implemented the Community Renewal Fund which saw Community Development Officers introduced to support skills development and employment levels. We also have networks and partnerships with skills providers and a strong understanding of local skills levels. However, we have not previously managed employment and skills-focused funding programmes.

Describe what further support would help address these challenges.

The guidance and webinars explained that interventions should address gaps in current provision from DWP and others.

However, while we have a strong understanding of the Borough’s employment and skills needs in general/ strategic terms (for example, through the Kent and Medway Workforce Skills Evidence Base), we do not currently have full details of all existing provision and the funding mix supporting it, or the independent monitoring and evaluation evidence that would help us identify which type of interventions represent best value for money, or the optimal planning and delivery geography.

Given that we will not be spending funds against the People and Skills allocation until Year 3, there is time to carry out further analysis of need. We would welcome further advice from DWP into this process, especially in relation to evidence of what has worked elsewhere or historically. As noted elsewhere in this Plan, we anticipate working with our neighbouring authorities in East Kent to develop this further.

How would you describe your team’s current capacity to manage funding for People and Skills interventions?

Strong capacity Some capacity Limited capacity

Describe the key capacity challenges (if you have any) for delivering People and Skills interventions. This may include challenges within your local authority and/or your local/regional delivery system.

As set out above, we do not currently have a resource focused on employment and skills interventions. Therefore we would rely solely on the knowledge and capacity of external organisations to deliver interventions under this Priority. The key capacity issue is in developing a base of knowledge sufficient to understand relevant demand and supply issues (although collaboration with neighbouring authorities may support this).

Describe what further support would help address these challenges.

Additional capacity to analyse local/ sub-regional need and to understand the supplier 'market'.

SUPPORT TO DELIVERY UKSPF

All lead authorities can use up to 4% of their UKSPF allocation to support the delivery of their chosen interventions but by exception, lead authorities will be able to use more than 4%. Are you planning to use more than 4%?

Yes

No

(If Yes) Explain why you wish to use more than 4%.

Approvals

Before submitting your investment plan, you should have approval from your:

- Chief Executive Officer
- Section 151 Officer
- Leader of your lead authority

Do you have approval from your Chief Executive Officer for this investment plan?

- Yes
- No

Do you have approval from your Section 151 Officer for this investment plan?

- Yes
- No

Do you have approval from the leader of your lead authority for this investment plan?

- Yes
- No

If you do not have approval from any of these people, please explain why this is:

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Additional documents

You will have received an email giving you access to a folder where you will need to upload supporting evidence to your investment plan. All applicants must complete and upload the following spreadsheet to the folder prior to submitting their investment plan:

- UKSPF Expenditure Profile spreadsheet
- UKSPF Indicative Deliverables spreadsheet

Your investment plan submission will be considered incomplete without the required documents.

Have you completed and uploaded the two spreadsheets to the SharePoint folder as requested?

- Yes
- No