

Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee – 4th April 2018

Briefing Report: EU Funding case studies

Issue

At the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 15th December members received a report highlighting the contribution being made to the County Council's economic growth programme by the current round of EU funding programmes. Members requested further details via case studies of key projects and programmes supported by EU funding. This briefing note highlights three EU funded projects and programmes being delivered by the County Council and its partners and considers some of the issues facing businesses seeking to benefit from EU funded business support programmes.

Background

Economic growth is a key priority for Staffordshire County Council, directly contributing to the priority outcome for Staffordshire's people to be able to access more good jobs and the benefits of economic growth.

The EU Funding programme forms an important and integral part of the Staffordshire County Council's Economic Growth Programme. The County Council is a key stakeholder in the EU Funding programme through the delivery of its own funded projects and programmes and also working with key external partners such as District Councils, Keele and Staffordshire Universities, FE colleges, Chamber of Commerce, business support and training providers, private sector businesses and a wide range of other partners from the private and voluntary sector.

This briefing paper is accompanied by a short presentation which gives further detail of three key projects and programmes supported by EU funding and delivered by the County Council and its partners that will be delivering key outcomes for the economic growth programme. These are:

- a. **Keele University** (Smart Innovation Hub)
- b. **Stoke on Trent & Staffordshire Growth Hub**
- c. **Low Carbon Business Evolution Programme (LCBEP)**

Current Position

EU Funding Programme performance

The Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee were informed at its meeting in December that **three quarters**, or **£102m**, of the **£138m** total EU funding available to Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire is committed to projects and programmes with funding agreements in place. Nearly two thirds of this



commitment is supporting business growth through either investment in infrastructure or providing guidance and financial support directly to new and existing businesses. Current programmes such as the Chamber of Commerce's **Mentoring for Growth** programme, Staffordshire University's **Be Inspired** programme, Keele University's **Business Bridge** programme, the County Council's **Growth Hub** and **Low Carbon** programmes, Stoke on Trent City Council's **Grants for Growth** programme and the **Midlands Engine Investment Fund**, all utilise funding from the EU (ERDF).

Regarding grant support, to date over **400** businesses have benefited directly from these programmes and this is likely to more than double by the time EU funding has been fully utilised.

Whilst these interventions make a significant contribution to the economic growth priorities and outcomes of the Stoke on Trent & Staffordshire LEP (SSLEP) and the County Council, there are some businesses that have difficulty in finding out about the different business grant opportunities and support available, and then when they do choose to engage, they find the application process and strict criteria of EU funding difficult to navigate and assimilate into their plans and proposals. To tackle this issue, the Growth Hub is providing direct help to businesses to improve their understanding of funding opportunities and to ensure proposals are suitable and eligible for grant support.

The presentation attached to this report looks further into some of the factors affecting businesses' ability to engage with EU funding business support opportunities.

Conclusion

The EU Funding Programme is performing well generally in terms of funding commitment and continues to play an integral part in the ongoing economic improvement of Stoke on Trent & Staffordshire, including directly supporting businesses across the County to start, survive and grow.

Committing all EU funding allocations in full remains a priority and there is confidence that this will be achieved with projects and programmes already identified and ready to respond to remaining bidding calls. The government has made a commitment to honour all EU funded projects and programmes with a contract in place by March 2019 even if delivery extends beyond the BREXIT date. This means that investment made through the EU Funding Programme will continue to play its part in the economic growth of Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire as far ahead as December 2023.

Beyond the current EU funding programme, one of the options to replace some of the funding provided by the EU for economic growth is the government's plans for a **UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF)**.



The success and performance with current EU, as well as UK funding programmes, is likely to play an important part in how much Stoke on Trent & Staffordshire will secure through future funding arrangements. The County Council and its partners will continue to lobby government and position itself to ensure momentum in economic growth continues, and that future funding is secured to address the future challenges and opportunities of Staffordshire's businesses and communities.

Appendix A – Presentation – EU Funding Programme case studies

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