



**UKSPF Northern Ireland Partnership Group**

**23 September 9:30am - 11.30am**

CO3 Offices, 31 Bruce Street Belfast BT2 7JD

**Agenda**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Sector</b>
Sue Gray (Chair)	DLUHC	UK government
Stephen Rusk	NIO	UK government
Adrian McCreesh	SOLACE (Mid Ulster District Council)	Local government
Lisa Toland (representing John Walsh – Belfast City Council)	SOLACE (Belfast City Council)	Local government
Professor Ian Greer (attending virtually)	Queen’s University Belfast	Higher education/skills
Seamus McAleavey	NICVA	Voluntary and community
Valerie McConville	CO3	Voluntary and community
Maeve Monaghan	NOW Group	Social enterprise
Ann McGregor (attending virtually)	NI Chamber of Commerce	Business

**Secretariat**

DLUHC were represented by: Chris Taylor, Christine Robinson, Mike Ward.

1. Chair’s welcome

- The Chair welcomed members to the Partnership Group meeting and thanked the group members for their support in developing the Investment Plan.
- The Chair noted that this meeting was to focus on discussion and indicative endorsement of the outline plan. This would enable DLUHC to finalise the plan for submission to DLUHC ministers, and then move forward into delivery of the fund.
- The Chair noted the need to complete the declaration of interests as some are still outstanding from members.

As discussed at the previous meeting,

- DLUHC circulated a draft investment plan for UKSPF prior to the meeting for the Partnership Group to discuss.



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- Proposals to engage political representatives are in development and a full plan will be shared in due course.

### 2. Draft Investment Plan proposition for each Investment Priority

DLUHC presented the broad assumptions and factors in the development of the UKSPF investment plan along with funding allocation and indicative allocations across the interventions. It was noted that:

- The ability to defray funds in 2022/23 is limited given the late stage in the financial year and the limited possibility for spend on shovel ready projects.
- For Multiply – the adult numeracy programme, engagement so far suggests the budget is oversized.
- DLUHC are continuing to explore options to reprofile some of the allocation across years, to respond to these factors.
- Support for economic inactivity is considered essential in 2023/24 given the significant reduction in EU funding post March 2023.
- The plan under consideration recognises the practical challenges for delivery and is based on reasonable assumptions for delivery of the fund in 2023-2025.

For the 'supporting local business' investment priority, DLUHC presented proposals including cornerstone investment in start up and business growth advice, and innovation support through a commissioning approach. Manufacturing support, dedicated sectoral support and investment in green transition is expected to be delivered on a competitive basis. Members were supportive of the overall approach. It was noted that:

- There has been significant support for start-ups previously in Northern Ireland and funding is available in this area. However some members noted that support for small and micro business in Northern Ireland remains critical and that ongoing support to engender a more entrepreneurial culture is important.
- While there are some benefits to tailoring business support to specific local needs, a broadly consistent offer across all 11 local council areas is needed.
- All business support should be available and appropriate for social economy businesses. However, where there is specialist support available, it should focus on assistance for social businesses to scale and grow, including assistance to social economy businesses to access development opportunities as well as work with non-social businesses more productively.
- To enhance R&D it is important that it fits into the wider innovation ecosystem including interventions such as Knowledge Transfer Partnerships and activity proposed through growth deals.

For the 'people and skills' investment priority, DLUHC presented the outline investment plan which includes a cornerstone investment in economic inactivity and basic and life skills. Members were supportive of the overall approach. It was noted that:

- The cornerstone investment in economic inactivity support is crucial and recognises the need in Northern Ireland, including targeting selected cohorts.
- New and innovative provision, including a focus on good job outcomes, is required to impact positively on the economic inactivity rate.



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- This will require close working with employers and key sectors to match newly economically active people with emerging job opportunities, and to support people with a career pathway where they have aspirations to progress.
- Skills support is a strong focus of Peace Plus, and this provides a justification for UKSPF's primary focus on economic inactivity.

For Multiply, DLUHC shared the indicative approach, including activity that may be delivered through FE colleges should delivery be possible via this route. Members noted:

- The need to deliver innovative provision in this area to reach adults with numeracy issues that are not coming forward themselves.
- Broad support for the approach to combine Multiply activity with support for economically inactive people through a joint competition in recognition of the work that VCS and other organisations already undertake in this space.

For 'communities and place', DLUHC presented the proposal that UKSPF will be allocated to councils to deliver green space projects, active travel and community and neighbourhood projects. Members were supportive of the overall approach. It was noted that:

- Volunteering to support investment under communities and place is crucial given the reduction in volunteering activity following COVID 19.

DLUHC also set out proposed design principles that all projects would be required to consider. Members agreed that:

- UKSPF will seek to ensure provision is available across NI
- UKSPF should prioritise larger collaborative projects to enhance flexibility, share risk and stimulate service innovation
- Selective business support will be part-funded by private contributions
- All deliverers will be required to:
  - Align with other funding/provision, setting out this alignment in clear customer journeys
  - Consider rural access and take up of provision
  - Consider net zero when designing project activities
  - Take account of equalities considerations
  - Consider procurement, tendering and quotations
  - For capital projects, consider community engagement in design, accessibility, designing out crime and sustainable plans for maintenance of any assets developed.

It was resolved that:

- Members endorsed the overall plan as drafted, subject to further development to address the points noted.

### 3. Future workplan

Further information on the future workplan will be shared at a future meeting. This will include the proposed review of the membership of the group once it moves from the plan development phase into delivery implementation.

### 4. Date of next meeting



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Housing & Communities

- The next meeting is likely to be in mid-October, for further consideration of the plan ahead of submission to DLUHC ministers.