



**European Union**

European Structural  
and Investment Funds

**GPB20230321 Item 4**  
**European Structural and Investment Funds**  
**2014 - 2020**

**Growth Programme for England**

**Minutes of the Growth Programme Board**

**11:00 6<sup>th</sup> December 2022**

**2 Marsham Street and Microsoft Teams**

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**Agenda**

1. Welcome and Introductions
2. Progress on Programmes\* *Agenda items marked \* were*
3. Communications Update\* *accompanied by Board papers*
4. ERDF Evaluation and Monitoring  
Update
5. Minutes of March Meeting and  
progress on Actions\*
6. Items for information\*
7. Any other business

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**Minutes**

**Item 1: Welcome and introductions**

1. **Jenny Dibden** welcomed Board Members and substitutes, including those who had travelled to London to attend the meeting in person in 2 Marsham Street. She advised that apologies received would be recorded in the minutes. She also advised that the meeting was being recorded and transcribed.
2. **Jenny Dibden** asked the board for any conflicts of interest and flagged that members had been written to for their annual declaration of interest returns. She added that she felt there was nothing on the agenda that would require members to recuse themselves.
3. **Jenny Dibden** invited board members to say if they had anything they wished to include under Items for Information. No items were received. She also invited members to put questions in the chat or put their Teams' hand up.
4. **Jenny** then introduced the Progress on Programmes item and handed over to DLUHC colleagues.

## Item 2: Progress of Programmes

### European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)

5. **David Malpass** introduced the ERDF update. He highlighted that the paper and slide deck had been/would be shared with members and took members through a presentation providing progress to the end of October 2022.
6. Among the headlines were a 99.6% commitment level, additional funding opportunities identified in UDFs and that just over £2bn had been paid out to beneficiaries across the programme (leaving over £1bn to pay out before the end of January 2024).
7. He also highlighted that potential FOREX gains were falling as sterling strengthened, an OP modification was due to be submitted this week and there were still some 600 projects left to close before the end of the programme. David then invited questions.
8. **Pernille Kousgaard** thanked David and the team for getting us to this point with ERDF despite all the difficulties. She extended this thank you to Clare Bonson and her ESF team as well.
9. She then asked, on resourcing, if David you could say a bit more about the impact it could have on the delivery and closure across each of the different regions, local authority and LEP areas as well as IBs. And on the reserve fund, Pernille asked for a little more detail around the dynamic process being used for allocating that money (Pernille did declare an interest here given that the Liverpool UDF has put in an application).
10. **David** responded, on resourcing, by saying his division are moving to a more flexible network with colleagues for instance based in Wolverhampton working alongside colleagues in the North West or South West. There are quite a few new staff so training them is a priority. And there's still a local footprint with local contacts and Heads of team for local partners to talk to. On closure strategy, there was nothing different specifically for IBs but he did say it might be a good opportunity to get the IB network together for a meeting to talk about SUDs.
11. On underspend **David** highlighted that the budget is currently moving around due to exchange rate fluctuations. Also working to understand slippage levels (particularly given that with so many projects moving to the right, they are now more likely to spend their money). Some money has been put into UDFs, and FIs are also being looked at. We are also talking to projects who are doing well and asking for extensions – although in many cases they are not asking for additional money (but we will keep listening to projects on this). We will also be looking at

Overbooking which is encouraged by the EC and can help in not losing out on funding coming from Brussels.

12. **Andy Churchill** then asked about FAST-CARE and if there were any plans to utilise it, flagging that it could be claimed retrospectively (and, if so, would this require changes to the OP)?
13. **Simon Jones** responded that careful consideration is been given to this and there is also an ongoing conversation with ESF colleagues. We are currently exploring Ministerial appetite and whether there is a delivery mechanism that we can use to be able to do it in a simple, clean and efficient way (because of the complexity of activity delivered through ERDF and ESF). We are also considering whether the quantum available is at a sufficient level to make the activity worthwhile. Simon did think that it would result in a need to change the OP but this would be do-able up to September 2023. And the retrospective element is one of the reasons this funding is being considered.
14. **James Newman** asked if the drawdowns made by the FIs are included in the numbers, highlighting that they still have significant funds to invest leading to a risk that significant amounts of money could be released back into the Fund quite late? He also asked what the plans were for formally closing the local ESIF committees which were put into dormant mode last year and if there were plans for any final report for what the programme has achieved in their area? He then asked who we were consulting with around additional funding (given that the advisory committees aren't operating)? And finally he asked if we were seeing any effect on match funding businesses and partners were being able to provide given the cost of living/energy price increases currently being experienced.
15. **David** responded that with FIs, they are only able to draw down funding in 1/4ly tranches and they need to have spent a high percentage of money already drawn down before they are able to draw any more down. So there is more confidence in their investment rates and in many cases they are ahead of schedule. **Simon Jones** added that the commitment level does anticipate the FIs, so if they don't achieve all of that, then we would not achieve the full commitment, but we do monitor progress against FIs very closely.
16. On ESIF committees, **Simon** stated that the two remaining National Sub-Committees (NSCs) are the Performance NSC and the Evaluation NSC. For the local ESIF committees, we have already agreed and communicated that these committees would no longer meet. We had agreed that there would be value in communicating what their contribution has been and how the programme has progressed in their areas. We have commissioned the national evaluators to pull together a bespoke overview of the national evaluation in relation to their areas. We have also committed to providing update reports twice a year to the people

that were on those committees to help them understand how the portfolio that they were part of designing and developing is progressing. Updates went out in July and the next set are due out in January. Simon added that this had been discussed openly and agreed at GPB earlier this year and we had been fully transparent on the process for local ESIF committees and how we would continue to communicate with them. **Tom Wood** added that one of the outputs of the national evaluation was to be an annex for each LEP in terms of performance. Pernille asked if this would include IB areas – Tom said he would come back to Pernille on that.

17. On the third question around decision making for local investments, **Simon** stated that we had the final calls in 2019 which was the opportunity for local partners to take decisions around their remaining allocations. After that the remaining funding was drawn into the centre. We went through different iterations around how that money was dealt with - a reserve fund that put money into COVID activity like the Welcome Back fund and other similar support. But alongside that, each PDT has a regional allocation, which they are managing their portfolio against and which they have to stay within. But within that, if there are projects which can absorb more money that are performing well, then it's within the PDT Heads gift to make those additional commitments and those additional commitments have been made. These have been quite low volume which is why we've been having these conversations in terms of UDFs and EC initiatives. Simon stated that he flagged at the Performance National Sub Committee that we still have to pay out almost £1bn worth of claims. That's a huge volume of work and has to be our priority – delivering against investments we currently have. So if we are making any additional commitments we have to be clear about the resource requirements around those.
18. **James** responded by asking if there was a mechanism in place for informing stakeholders in these local areas that extra funding is being put into certain projects?
19. **Simon** stated that above and beyond the twice yearly reports there is no formal mechanism but conversations are happening and PDT Heads aren't working in isolation – they do tend to work with local partners.
20. **Helen Millne**, reinforcing a conversation held at the PNSC, wanted to ensure that we maximize the expenditure and revenue at every point. She stated that it was important that we were able to utilize any funds through to December. Revenue is an issue in the business support space in the next 18 months across the country and if there is any opportunity to reinvest any underspend in that area, she was sure it will be greatly appreciated by multiple areas.

**ACTION 0612/01: ERDF MA to convene meeting of IB network to discuss SUDs delivery/closure.**

**ACTION 0612/02: ERDF MA to come back to Pernille on whether there would be additional reports in the national evaluation on IB areas (as well as the LEP areas).**

### **European Social Fund (ESF)**

21. **Clare Bonson** introduced the ESF Programme Update item, running through a few of the highlights, including word that commitment stands at 96.9% and that the programme had hit it's N+3 targets for 2022. She also highlighted that with FAST-CARE, it would probably require a call which clearly brings with it timing constraints. So it's being looked into but keen to flag both this and the need for an OP amendment (as Simon stated earlier) which itself has resource and time issues. And while it is retrospective, there is also complexity around a '26 week after entering EC' rule. So a lot of detail to work through but ESF team are absolutely determined to investigate this and to maximise the spend and the impact.
22. **Clare** closed her introduction by looking at resourcing and stating that an absolute priority is to retain staff, in particular given that those in the roles are filled by skilled and experienced colleagues, to ensure spend and the impact of the programme are maximised.
23. **Pete Long** then went through some slides on programme performance, highlighted the under-performance strategy and flagged that spend is being allowed right up to December 31<sup>st</sup> 2023. He also flagged an action note open until the end of December which allows projects which meet a certain set of criteria to access further funding. A few applications have been received through this which the MA are in the process of assessing.
24. **Peter Matthijs** highlighted the large amounts still to be committed and queried how the 96.9% commitment figure had been reached. He also asked for the dashboard within the ESF slides to be shared. **Clare** assured Peter that they were absolutely doing everything possible to ensure that they have projects lined up in order to spend the money. She also said the dashboard (and the full slides) would be shared with members. **Mark Jackson** then explained that the total value of the programme fluctuates based on the exchange rates and this effects commitment levels - the programme value will soon be recalculated. This data, along with a full table showing all these fluctuations, would be available for the next meeting.

25. **Peter Matthijs** went onto say that it was good to see the general figures around the number of participants (1.8m), the number of these who have found employment (230,000) and the number that went into further training or education (160,000). He asked if it is possible to say whether or not these are good results? **Clare** stated that their analysts were showing this as a positive outcome overall but the MA would look into this further and come back to the next GPB with a clearer answer on this. **Pete Long** added that it would be in the Annual Implementation Reports and there are a suite of evaluation reports which have just been published that will give a clearer picture on this as well.
26. **James Newman** stated that he had major concerns around slippage – how much of the slippage will be recovered and is there match out there to use it elsewhere (is there a way of finding match from other Government Departments?). He added that he felt it was time for the MA to discount all of the slippages. He added that he didn't see 20% of participants in work as a positive outcome. **Clare** came back to assure James that the MA have for the last six months (and longer) been looking at how they can absolutely maximize their spend and are working with some vast CFO's where match is a little bit more secure and using some of the mainstream programmes as match so that they can actually spend the maximum amount through to the end of the programme. **Pete Long** added that the MA are challenging each project to actually come up with a realistic plan and they are challenging these on an individual basis. Additionally they are also looking at trends of how performance has happened in terms of finances to actually predict the size of remaining funds that need committing. And on slippage, the MA have given projects an opportunity to try and recover from the COVID period and that is part of the overall assessment for each project. They don't want to choke the delivery if it can be made locally. The MA are still planning for underspends, albeit there are limited options.
27. **Pernille** followed up on the conversation between Peter and Clare and asked if there could be a deeper dive into the outcomes and whether or not they are positive (although she does recognise that with some of the 'very far away from the labour market' groups being worked with, it could be that the results are good). She went on to express a concern that some areas now have devolution deals which include training etc. and she doesn't want to see additional CFO funding parachuted in where there is a differing approach to it. She asked if a conversation on this could be had at the PNSC meeting.
28. **Andy Churchill** stated that he had noted from the paper on outcomes of the disadvantaged groups that with the figures for women, the actual is a long way below the commitment. He asked if the MA see this as a problem. **Pete Long** responded that he didn't see it as a problem but that he would just have to take it away to understand why there is such a lag on those projects/numbers and come back to GPB.

**ACTION 0612/03: ESF MA to come to next GPB with a deeper dive around programme outcomes/performance and how positive (or otherwise) they are.**

**ACTION 0612/04: Conversation around the alignment of any additional CFO funding going into areas with devolution deals and differing approaches to training to be held at PNSC.**

**ACTION 0612/05: ESF MA to come back to GPB on why there is such a lag on figures for women which currently shows the actual as being a long way below the commitment**

### **European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)**

29. **Colin Whelan** presented the EAFRD update, including details on spend and payments. Headlines included that just over £140m of the £157m funding committed across 982 projects had been spent to date. He also stated that extensions have been granted to projects in some exceptional circumstances

30. **Pernille** highlighted that within the presentation (and in the paper) the number of Business Development projects looked wrong and suggested it might be that there are 613 to bring the total to 982. She requested that Emma Friend confirm this at or ahead of the next meeting. She also highlighted that jobs created in business support within the paper seemed to have a time lag compared to food processing.

**ACTION 0612/06: EAFRD MA to come back to GPB to confirm number of projects that are within business development area.**

31. **Jenny Dibden** thanked Colin and then highlighted that there would not be an EMFF presentation for this item as they didn't have anything new or substantive to share. Their next update, including work high level findings from the post project monitoring report, will be provided at the March meeting

### Item 3: Communications Update

#### Welcome Back fund local update: Ashfield, Nottinghamshire

32. **Sarah Daniel** of Ashfield District Council talked members through their local Welcome Back Fund project, highlighting achievements, learning points and feedback received locally.
33. **Huw Edwards** asked about the value of and how effective items such as posters and flyers were for the campaign. **Sarah** responded that she felt they were an important part of the mix but that there were other online elements to the communications as well such as social media. All types of comms had an important place in the project.
34. **Guus Muijzers** asked if there was any knowledge of how the fact that this project was paid for by EU money had been received. **Sarah** responded that there wasn't any clear indication on what people thought of this - the funding source had been clear on all the various promotional materials but there wasn't any feedback around opinions on this matter.
35. **Peter Thornton** made the point that this type of funding will still be required, in particular for District Councils, once ERDF comes to an end. We can't assume that because COVID is over, the challenges are over for town centres.

#### Communications 2022 annual update and 2023 Annual Activity Plan

36. **Rob Martell** and **James Ritchie (DWP)** then talked through communications activities delivered by the MAs in 2022 and highlighted in the paper for this item. They picked out key activities and the upcoming Annual Information Activities for the ERDF and ESF programmes (planned for later in December).
37. They also talked through the Communications Annual Activity Plan for 2023, which had been shared with members with other papers prior to the meeting.
38. **Huw Edwards** asked if the MAs could give a brief idea of the impact we are expecting from communications and what sort of feedback has been received from audiences. **Rob** highlighted previous years have had a focus, among others, on encouraging potential applicants to come forward and apply for funds but given where we are now with the programme, the communications at this stage, certainly from an ERDF perspective, is to support existing projects through to their closure. **James** added that in previous years a stakeholder evaluation on our communications work has been undertaken and this has provided a strong sense of how our communications activities are received and how effective they have been. **Simon Jones** highlighted that with the national evaluation being undertaken for ERDF, colleagues within Whitehall have been consulted on how the final



evaluation could be made to be as useful as possible in terms of helping them to develop better future policy.

39. **James Newman** asked if we should be putting more of a marketing effort into supporting those organisations that are trying to run projects but are finding it hard to find people and businesses to be supported by the programmes, perhaps in the form of marketing on behalf of those companies who are delivering. **Rob** highlighted potential difficulties with this around budget sizes required and also flagged that projects do each allocate a percentage of their grant to their own bespoke communications and marketing. It was agreed that James would receive a fuller response on what was possible in this area within two weeks.

40. **James Ritchie** highlighted a National Lottery Community Fund event which was set to take place on Thursday 8 December. He stated that he would share details with members immediately following the meeting.

**ACTION 0612/07: ERDF and ESF MAs to come back to James Newman on what was possible in terms of his suggestions around Marketing support for individual projects**

#### **Item 4: ERDF Monitoring and Evaluation update**

41. **Simon Jones** and **Tom Wood** provided a brief overview of the materials the national evaluators had pulled together to date on the evaluation of the ERDF programme (which had been shared the previous day with members of the Evaluation and Performance NSCs). This included a run through the six key evaluation workstreams and a quick look at some headline findings across each of the PAs.

42. **Tom** also ran through the next steps on the evaluation which included a need to report to the EC by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2022 and the publishing of the full final report in 2023.

43. **Pernille** expressed a few thoughts around certain PAs and also asked how the report on National Sub-Committees would work, asking if it would be a freestanding annex?

44. **Tom** responded that how they operated was covered in the phase 2 process evaluation so within phase 3 each NSC report will look at how the funded activities that were guided and delivered by these NSC have performed. These reports will be disseminated down to those members who are still around.

## **Item 5: Minutes of September meeting and progress on Actions**

45. **Rob Martell** flagged that the action relating to the Welcome Back fund (2209/01) was partially met by the earlier Welcome Back Fund presentation. There just remained the need to publish a selection of Welcome Back Fund case studies which would be possible once Ministerial permission had been received. Action 2206/03 relating to EMFF colleagues reporting to GPB on high level findings of programme evaluation was rolled over to the March 2023 GPB and the 2206/07 around further ERDF reporting around C1 and C34 was now complete.
46. **James Newman** requested his apologies for the September GPB were recorded. Members were otherwise happy to approve the minutes as a true record of the meeting.

## **Standing Items 6: Items for Information**

### **National Sub-Committee Report**

47. **Rob Martell** flagged that the two remaining NSCs; the Performance Sub Committee (PNSC) and the Evaluation National Sub-Committee (ENSC) had both met since the last GPB and brief updates were provided in the NSC paper. Members of both NSCs were invited to attend a briefing which took place on 5<sup>th</sup> December providing an update on the ERDF National Evaluation. The session was well attended.

## **Item 7: Any Other Business**

48. **Huw Edwards** raised a point on ERDF reporting for PA2, asking for a clear picture of what is happening with rural broadband. **Simon Jones** offered to take this away and come back with some clarification on the position.

**ACTION 0612/08: ERDF MA to provide further detail on how rural broadband has performed under PA2.**

49. There were no other items raised under AOB – **Jenny Dibden** confirmed that the next meeting will be held on Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> March, 11.00-13:30. A decision will be made in the coming weeks around whether the meeting will be a hybrid again or on Teams only. Jenny thanked everyone for their time and attention/input and closed the meeting.

**Meeting closed: 13:55**

## Annex A

### **List of agreed actions from December 2022 Growth Programme Board meeting**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Assigned to:</b>
0612/01	ERDF MA to convene meeting of IB network to discuss SUDs delivery/closure.	David Malpass, DLUHC
0612/02	ERDF MA to come back to Pernille on whether there would be additional reports in the national evaluation on IB areas (as well as the LEP areas).	Tom Wood, DLUHC
0612/03	ESF MA to come to next GPB with a deeper dive around programme outcomes/performance and how positive (or otherwise) they are.	DWP
0612/04	Conversation to take place around the alignment of any additional CFO funding going into areas with devolution deals and differing approaches to training to be held at PNSC.	DWP
0612/05	ESF MA to come back to GPB on why there is such a lag on figures for women which currently shows the actual as being a long way below the commitment	DWP
0612/06	EAFRD MA to come back to GPB to confirm number of projects that are within business development area.	DEFRA
0612/07	ERDF and ESF MAs to come back to James Newman on what was possible in terms of his suggestions around Marketing support for individual projects.	Rob Martell (DLUHC and James Ritchie (DWP)
0612/08	ERDF MA to provide further detail on how rural broadband has performed under PA2.	Simon Jones, DLUHC

### **Carried over from previous meetings**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Assigned to:</b>
2206/03	EMFF colleagues to report to the next GPB on high level findings from the programme evaluation.	EMFF colleagues
2209/01	Welcome Back Fund case studies to be published online and to feature as part of the Annual Communications update at the December GPB. (second part met, publishing of Welcome Back Fund case studies online still outstanding)	Rob Martell, DLUHC



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**Growth Programme for England**

**Chair:**

	<b>Sector/Organisation Representing</b>	<b>Attending (Y/N)</b>	<b>Substitute For</b>
<b>Jenny Dibden</b> Director, Community Investment and Funding Services	DLUHC	Y	

**Board Members (full and advisory):**

	<b>Sector/Organisation Representing</b>	<b>Attending (Y/N)</b>	<b>Substitute For</b>
<b>David Malpass</b> Communities and European Programmes	DLUHC	Y	
<b>Helen Millne</b> The Women's Organisation	Voluntary/Community Sector	Y	
<b>Cllr Peter Thornton</b> Cumbria County Council	Local Authorities	Y	
<b>James Newman</b> Sheffield City Region	LEPs	Y	
<b>Andy Churchill</b> Network for Europe	Voluntary/Community Sector	Y	Carol Botten
<b>Alison Gordon</b> Greater Manchester Combined Authority	LEPs	Y	Simon Nokes
<b>Natasha Waller</b> LEP Network	LEPs	Y	
<b>Dr Huw Edwards</b> Thames Valley Berkshire	LEPs	Y	
<b>Pernille Kousgaard</b> Liverpool City Region	SUD	Y	

<b>Guus Muijzers</b> European Commission	EC	Y	
<b>Peter Matthijs</b> European Commission	EC	Y	
<b>Joanne Dobson</b> Coventry University	Higher Education	Y	John Lathom
<b>Janet Thornton</b> Rural and Farming Network	Rural	Y	
<b>Richard Powell</b> Chair Wild Anglia	Local Nature Partnerships	Y	
<b>Clare Bonson</b> ESF Division	DWP	Y	
<b>Simon Jones</b> Communities and European Programmes	DLUHC	Y	
<b>Catherine Crocker</b> European Programmes	GLA	Y	Alex Conway
<b>Paul Green</b> Local Government Association	Local Government	Y	
<b>Colin Whelan</b> EAFRD Division	DEFRA	Y	Emma Friend

#### **Additional Attendees / Observers:**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Sector/Organisation</b>	
<b>Mark Jackson</b> ESF Division	DWP	Presenter
<b>Pete Long</b> ESF Division	DWP	Presenter
<b>James Ritchie</b> ESF Division	DWP	Presenter
<b>Tom Wood</b> Communities and European Programmes	DLUHC	Presenter

<b>Sarah Daniel</b> Ashfield District Council	Welcome Back Fund	Presenter
<b>Rob Martell</b> Growth Programme Board Secretariat	DLUHC	Growth Programme Board Secretariat/Presenter
<b>Sean Hughes</b> Growth Programme Board Secretariat	DLUHC	Growth Programme Board Secretariat
<b>Joanna Henderson</b> ESF Division	DWP	Observer
<b>Carolyn Hyde</b> ESF Division	DWP	Observer
<b>Meaghan Willis</b> ESF Division	DWP	Observer
<b>David Read</b> Communities and European Programmes	DLUHC	Observer

#### Apologies:

	Sector/Organisation	Sending a Substitute?
<b>Simon Nokes</b> Greater Manchester Combined Authority	LEPs	Yes, Alison Gordon
<b>John Lathom</b> Coventry University	Higher Education	Yes, Jo Dobson
<b>Carol Botten</b> Network for Europe	Voluntary/Community Sector	Yes, Andy Churchill
<b>Mark Burns</b> ESF Division	DWP	Yes, Mark Jackson
<b>Emma Friend</b> EAFRD Division	DEFRA	Yes, Colin Whelan
<b>Harry Stirk</b> EMFF Team	Marine Management Organisation	No
<b>Jennifer Gunn</b> LEP Network	LEPs	Yes, Natasha Waller
<b>Emily Kent</b> Cornwall Council	Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	No