GLLEP ERDF Technical Assistance Summative Assessment Report

November 2021

Metro Dynamics

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Executive Summary

£436,335 total expenditure

38 organisations assisted

23 dissemination events

389 event attendees

The Technical Assistance Programme has played an important role in making potential delivery partners aware of ERDF funding opportunities, de-mystifying the application process, and providing a responsive point of contact to deal with application queries. There was clear demand from partners, and the assistance has been well received

What worked well

- A clear strategy and governance structure to ensure delivery against local objectives and priorities.
- Balancing a broad-based promotional campaign with targeted engagement activities to address gaps in the project portfolio and bring projects forward.
- Providing a flexible and tailored advisory service which was responsive and accessible, and which was delivered by staff with strong technical / thematic expertise, project development experience and local knowledge.
- Supporting inclusion by targeting resource where projects were complex, large-scale, less developed or brought forward by organisations with limited bid writing experience.

Taking this forward

- Retain the provision of flexible and tailored one-to-one advisory support and retain a Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership area forum to provide strategic oversight as well as potentially pool / align funds.
- Identification of a prospectus of key strategic interventions which can be the focus for project development activity and engagement with prospective funders and investors. This may include commissioned or targeted project development activity to address key needs and gaps in the pipeline in a more innovative and collaborative way.
- Explore the potential to establish a development fund to progress major schemes.
- Establish knowledge sharing forums and consider opportunities for mentoring / strategic advisory relationships to share expertise between partners.

1 Introduction

Metro Dynamics has been commissioned by Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) to provide an independent evaluation of the Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership (GLLEP) ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) Technical Assistance Programme (TAP). This report presents the findings from the summative assessment.

Technical Assistance

Project Overview

TAP was a c£436,000 project to provide technical assistance and capacity building support to ERDF applicants under the 2014-2020 ERDF programme in Greater Lincolnshire[1]. Delivered by LCC, the project provided revenue resource (two full time posts) to promote ERDF opportunities, ensure compliance, and support the development of a pipeline of proposals that contributed to the successful delivery of the GLLEP ESIF Strategy and ERDF Operational Programme. The project commenced in 2016 and completed in 2020 following the agreement of a contract extension in 2019.

The project aimed to:

- Deliver a technical assistance package, generating and underpinning a Greater Lincolnshire focus, throughout the ESIF programme;
- Increase understanding and knowledge of the programme and activity calls, whilst also providing practical support to projects within the ESIF Process; and,
- Provide a co-ordinated approach to delivery; drawing in expertise from sector specialists/strategic review groups to ensure good quality bids come forward from Greater Lincolnshire.

TAP Support Offer

The project funded:

- Promotional workshops - to promote the ERDF programme and identify a pipeline of potential projects throughout Greater Lincolnshire;
- 121 meetings with applicants and provision of technical application advice; and,
- A technical workshop on Low Carbon/Environmental.

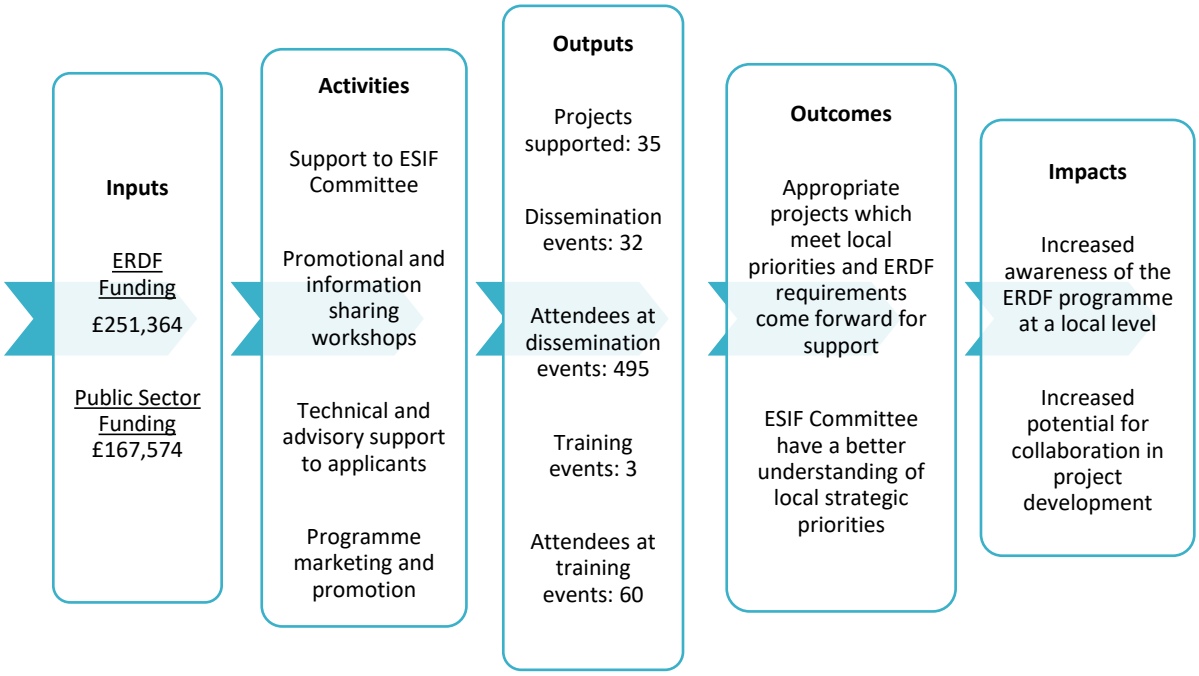
[1] Referred to as 'Greater Lincolnshire' or 'the LEP area' throughout

TAP staff also supported the appraisal and strategic review process by providing feedback and advice to the ESIF Committee regarding projects coming forward for funding.

Project Logic Model

The overarching objective of the project was to increase the pipeline of eligible projects coming forward for ERDF support that demonstrated strong strategic fit with local priorities and needs. The anticipated outputs[2], outcomes and impacts are outlined in the programme logic model below (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Project Logic Model



The project logic was underpinned by the following assumptions:

- There was demand and a need for technical support i.e. there were capacity gaps amongst potential applicants;
- Promotional events and one-to-one support on the scope and scale proposed was sufficient to engage a broad range of potential applicants and meet applicant's support needs;
- The level of project resourcing was sufficient to meet applicant support needs;
- The delivery team had the necessary skills and expertise to bring forward eligible projects; and,

[2] 'Attendee' outputs comprise the total number of attendees at events and training rather than unique service users

- The project facilitated the development of projects which aligned with local needs as well as ERDF requirements.

Evaluation Objectives

The evaluation is aligned with ERDF reporting requirements and considers:

- Relevance and need;
- Performance;
- Design, management and delivery; and,
- Impact.

In addition, the evaluation has considered wider good practice in project development processes to inform future technical assistance and capacity building interventions. The approach has included:

Stage	Task
Inception	• Project inception meeting with LCC management and delivery staff
Desk based research	• Review of existing evidence regarding the role of capacity building support and 'what works' to build the evidence base and inform future interventions • Review of programme documentation • Review of programme monitoring data
Primary research	• Stakeholder interviews: including consultees at the Growth Hub and GLLEP • Eight telephone interviews with applicants receiving support
Reporting	• Data/research analysis • Draft and final reporting

Report Structure

This report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2: project relevance and need;
- Chapter 3: performance analysis;
- Chapter 4: review of delivery and management processes, project design and benefits; and,
- Chapter 5: conclusions and considerations for future TA interventions.

2 Project Rationale and Need

Introduction

Chapter two explores the project rationale and need, drawing on interview findings and a wider review of good practice.

Key Findings

- The findings suggest the project design was appropriate and there was a clear rationale for intervention. There were knowledge and capability gaps within the GLLEP area which, without intervention, would restrict delivery partner's ability to bring forward compliant ERDF applications which met both national and local priorities and policy objectives.
- Key support needs included: technical support and an accessible point of contact; assistance to prepare funding applications in line with HMT's five case model; help to articulate and demonstrate the strategic need for interventions; brokerage to make relevant connections to other partners and technical support; practical assistance with project development.
- Challenges to project development included: limited lead-in times for external funding opportunities which stifled innovation and resulted in development work being undertaken at risk; competitive funds which hindered collaboration and partnership working; thematic knowledge of 'new' agendas such as net zero, inclusion and social value.

Project Rationale

The rationale and need for TAP was to:

- Address information failures which prevented potential ERDF projects coming forward for funding, and which prevented the right type of projects (i.e. tailored to local needs and priorities) coming forward and being approved; and,
- Address capability gaps which resulted in ineligible or non-compliant projects coming forward and resulted in an uneven distribution of projects across priority themes, geographies and beneficiary groups.

Interviews with strategic stakeholders and applicants suggest that the rationale for TAP was valid, but there continues to be a clear need and role for TA intervention to support the delivery of major programmes for the following reasons:

A need for technical compliance support and a central point of contact: Although the GLLEP area has previously delivered successful ERDF programmes, applicants continue to require advisory support to address specific technical requirements. All consultees have valued having access to a single point of contact to address technical questions and provide assurance regarding elements of the application process and official guidance which are deemed 'vague' or 'confusing'.

"We've not made significant changes because of the TA support, but it helped to confirm our thinking" ERDF applicant

Having a local resource ensured a quicker response than contacting MHCLG[3] directly, enabling applicants to continue progressing their applications at pace. It was noted that a neutral and external sounding board for projects was highly valued, and a consistent point of contact enabled applicants to build a trusted working relationship with TAP staff.

The most frequently cited support needs included legal compliance/state aid issues and compliance with ERDF procurement regulations. Other technical support needs included:

- Differentiating between indirect, direct and fixed costs;
- Interpreting the application questions and understanding what MHCLG was trying to 'test';
- Checking audit requirements;
- Evidencing value for money (VfM) and the appropriate scale of outputs required; and,
- Helping organisations understand and manage their risk.

A local gateway into support and key point of contact was deemed critical in simplifying and speeding up the application and decision-making process.

Limited knowledge of HM Treasury's Five Case Model which underpins most competitive funding applications: Understanding of ERDF requirements and capability to respond to competitive funding opportunities varies across the GLLEP area, particularly as staff changes have reduced technical expertise within some delivery organisations. Several consultees have suggested there is variable understanding as to how to produce Green Book compliant business cases or the key principles which underpin this.

GLLEP's call for projects highlighted limited capability amongst some partners to meet the requirements of a Strategic Outline Case. It was noted that although the process provided useful insight into local partner's delivery priorities, many of the responses lacked detail, and many partners were unable to clearly articulate the basic concepts of the five-case

[3] Since the commencement of the evaluation MHCLG have been renamed the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities but are still referred to as MHCLG throughout this report to reflect their name at the time the TA project was delivered.

model - deliverability, strategic fit and an appreciation of the wider policy context, or value for money.

Delivery partners therefore needed support to interpret competitive funding applications structured around this approach. TAP facilitated this interpretation, particularly during post application negotiations and when responding to MHCLG clarification requests.

A need to ensure strategic fit: Technical assistance resource has ensured projects coming forward align and contribute towards GLLEP and local priorities in addition to ERDF requirements, and make sense as a programme of activity. TAP resource has also been able to provide local insight to the ESIF Committee which has helped to 'bring projects to life' and helped appraisers understand projects (and their value) within the local context. It was commented that this is particularly important for areas such as Greater Lincolnshire where analysis of value for money needs to be adjusted to a very unique geography which comprises a dispersed rural economy, coastal communities, a primary city and network of market towns.

Importance of oversight and ability to make connections: As competitive bids are primarily developed by delivery organisations in isolation, having Technical Assistance staff with knowledge of projects and overarching/emerging strategic needs across the GLLEP area, has helped to ensure relevant connections were made and applicants also had access to technical and subject matter experts within the County Council and LEP where required. The majority of applicants indicated that they do not typically discuss their project pipelines with other Districts or external partners. Several accepted however that there is likely to be a considerable amount of shared experience across the GLLEP area which is not being fully utilised.

A need to share information and proactively engage to break down barriers to take-up: Whilst many potential delivery partners were aware of ERDF, the engagement events helped to bring forward the right types of projects. Several consultees noted that the opportunity to hear directly from MHCLG and GLLEP regarding what they were looking to achieve through the programme and the types of projects and interventions which would be eligible, as well as the opportunity to sense-check their projects with funders, was identified as being particularly helpful in deciding whether or not to apply. For some partners, events provided the assurance required for delivery partners to commit further investment to project development and feasibility testing.

In some instances, potential applicants were not aware of the ERDF funding opportunity, and it was the marketing and proactive engagement activity of TAP staff which was instrumental in bringing forward applications. For one consultee it was noted that they had never applied to ERDF before and TAP was critical to them progressing with the opportunity.

"The process is cumbersome and without input from LCC we wouldn't have been able to do it…. there's a lot of bureaucracy, lots of repetition – initial bid, full bid, follow-up outcomes, and strange terminology" ERDF applicant

The findings support that there are capacity gaps amongst potential ERDF delivery partners which creates a need for technical assistance. Although some support is available directly from MHCLG, this does not include advisory support and has been deemed less responsive, accessible and 'tailored' to local needs.

Project Development Processes

The evaluation has explored delivery partners' project development processes with a view to developing a better understanding of where capacity and capability constraints lie and the nature of support needs.

Pipeline Projects

Project development processes vary by organisation, but nearly all projects are developed internally unless there is a specific requirement for a partnership approach (e.g. across district boundaries, scale of intervention). Some delivery organisations will discuss their potential project with contacts in other districts or organisations, but these are usually high-level discussions where there is a close personal contact. The GLLEP's Officers Group, which brings together officer-level staff from across the LEP area to discuss new/emerging developments was also noted as a useful mechanism to build officer's knowledge of strategic developments but also to share information between districts regarding projects and interventions being developed or delivered.

Most delivery organisations have a pipeline of projects they are interested in progressing which are at varying stages of development. Typically, consultees suggest that the extent to which projects are progressed is dependent upon funding. Although a lead officer will oversee the project development process, funding is usually sought to buy-in consultancy expertise to provide technical assistance, undertake feasibility work, economic analysis or support case making. For major infrastructure and capital schemes this is understandable as engineering and design/architect input will be required, but it was noted by several consultees that although they have a basic understanding of the five-case model, most would be uncomfortable leading the development of a full business case in its entirety.

Specifically in relation to ERDF projects, several projects for which funding was sought were already operational and were seeking continuation funding or extension over a broader geography; others were pipeline projects which were adapted to meet ERDF requirements.

For instance, projects such as The Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Growth and Efficiency (GL-LEGE) Programme, or Grants4Growth, were already being delivered and funding was sought to extend delivery into new geographies. This meant minimal project

development was required. This was also the case for the Aerospace Unlocking Potential (Aerospace UP) project which initially applied for ERDF funding with support from the Black Country LEP, and has been extended to cover eight Midlands LEP areas.

Few projects were developed specifically in response to the ERDF opportunity, the exception being the Witham/Slea Blue Green Corridor project (an amalgamation of two previously separate ideas) which was developed as neither South Kesteven District Council, North Kesteven District Council nor GLLEP had a pipeline of environmental projects they could put forward for funding. It was noted by several consultees that whilst some thematic areas are always popular and over-subscribed, there remain capacity gaps in relation to low carbon and net zero schemes.

Project Development Challenges

Technical knowledge of funding schemes and Green Book case making are only part of the difficulties experienced by partners during project development. Although TAP can respond to these, there are wider issues which also need to be considered but which are frequently outside the control of Accountable Bodies.

Lead-in Times and Competitive Funding

There is often limited lead time for external funding opportunities, therefore organisations have to rely on pipeline projects. Most funders are looking for propositions which can guarantee delivery within a specified timeframe and therefore development time is limited, and applications will require some level of assurance that the project is relatively well progressed. Project development work therefore has to be primarily undertaken 'at risk'. In addition to limited lead in times, the competitive nature of most funding opportunities can also be a barrier to collaboration, information sharing and innovation.

Tailoring to national funding requirements

Although the ESIF Strategy allowed local partners to determine the strategic focus for ERDF intervention, the broad parameters and timescales for most funding programmes are still determined nationally. This lack of local flexibility and control can create the need to 'fit' schemes to national priorities. It was noted that in trying to fit funding requirements and output targets, partners can often lose sight of their overall objectives and are at risk of over-promising to secure funding rather than being realistic regarding key deliverables. The need for programmes to move away from output delivery to focus more on outcomes, as well as social value, was highlighted by several stakeholders. However, the ability to balance these competing requirements has implications for project development support.

National appraisal also means that schemes are often assessed by people unfamiliar with the local area and context. Being able to present a strong strategic and VfM case is an important consideration for funding applicants, particularly within a predominantly rural geography where the scale of outputs and unit costs may differ to within urban areas.

Thematic knowledge

With net zero and low carbon firmly established as national and local policy drivers, there is a need to raise delivery capability within this thematic area and consider the need for active commissioning under future programmes. The shortage of environmental projects in the most recent call for funding suggests a gap in delivery capability, and several consultees have noted that there is a need to develop the capabilities of local partners to prevent Greater Lincolnshire from being reliant on national delivery providers. Of the environmental projects we consulted, officers suggested that targeted support around calculating environmental outputs would be beneficial. With more interventions now also expected to address a broader range of social as well as economic objectives given inclusive growth agendas, this might also be beneficial to wider projects.

Alternative Approaches to TA

The evaluation process has examined other approaches to project development and capacity building which could inform future support programmes.

Learning from other TA Projects

Findings from other publicly available TA evaluations suggests that other projects have adopted a broadly similar approach to project delivery, and assistance is well received and valued by applicants. The following approaches were found to work well:

- Similar to the ESIF Committee and GLLEP Officer Group in Greater Lincolnshire, in the SEMLEP area, an ERDF forum was established to provide a regular opportunity for applicants to discuss projects and exchange good practice. This was regarded as being a very supportive network suggesting there is merit in creating space for information sharing.
- TA schemes have offered a broad range of services typically comprising some form of advisory and workshop-style training which has been found to be effective in providing an appropriate blend of tailored and generic support to address knowledge and capability gaps. Workshops have covered a broad range of subjects including marketing your project, how to measure impact, and details of call specifications. Alternative services have included:
    - A read and review service for funding applications;
    - The production of 'how to…' guides which can be accessed online; and,
    - Targeted events to support the development of consortia and supply chains.
- As applicant's experience and knowledge of ERDF varies, there is evidence that more experienced applicants do not need as much guidance, and therefore resource can be focused on newer applicants or organisations where there has been a change in personnel. The Humber, York, North Yorkshire and East Riding (YNYER) TA Partnership

offers workshops which specifically targets organisations new to EU funding and those with more experience.

- Evaluation of the Black Country's TAP concluded that the extension of TA services to encompass post-bid support would be highly valued by delivery partners although is ineligible under ERDF rules.
- Some areas have run ERDF and ESF TA projects concurrently which have reduced delivery costs and provided efficiency savings. This approach has also allowed for a cross-pollination of European funding expertise derived from both ERDF and ESF programmes.
- Digital and new technologies have been deployed effectively in some areas to extend the reach of TA and provide different engagement mechanisms. This includes the use of social media to promote awareness and provide 'micro-interventions[4]'; and the development of bite-sized training videos which can be accessed online. Dedicated websites to house resources have also been established. Investment in resources and training materials can often have wider application beyond ERDF and provides a legacy output from the programme. As more blended learning formats are likely to continue to be popular in the future given changes to remote working, it has been noted that consideration should be given to capturing data regarding the use and effectiveness of support delivered via these formats in the future.
- Some programmes have used centralised databases to bring together local partners contacts and scale-up delivery activity whilst ensuring the broadest possible reach. This approach has also provided one communication channel to ensure a consistent message.
- Evaluation of the YNYER region's TAP highlighted that when there were few funding calls being issued, this impacts the ability of TA projects to deliver their outputs and interest in training often falls. Working closely with the Managing Authority to develop a schedule for calls enables TAPs to gear-up and mobilise partners to specific call requirements, as well as plan on-going training support around peak delivery periods.

Example of Alternative TA Approach

One TA partnership's support offer comprises:

- Information about ERDF and ESF in layman's terms through publicity events, the website, publications and workshops;
- An opportunity to discuss project ideas and check that they fit with the funding's general eligibility and the Calls criteria;
- Brokerage and partnership development seminars;

[4] i.e., the provision of very light touch information or guidance usually via a social media platform

- Advice and support to help partners to complete the outline application form;
- Provision of technical advice covering compliance with procurement, State Aid and publicity requirements;
- A service to cross check applications against the Call specification prior to the closing date;
- Facilitation and delivery of workshops to explain the requirements of ERDF and ESF throughout the project life cycle;
- Access to a range of resources and guides via a dedicated TAP website. This includes case studies of successful projects and guidance materials; and,
- Workshops that are aimed at those new to EU funding (beginners) and those with some experience (intermediate).

This project has successfully brokered new collaborative partnerships. For instance, following a call for business scale up support interventions, a launch workshop was held followed up by one-to-one support to applicants and a subsequent brokerage event. This brought together four successful outline applications to create one application with several delivery partners who will each offer a distinct service.

Learning from Wider Programmes

One of the key findings from the evaluation is that ERDF restrictions and regulations often creates an additional layer of complexity and bureaucracy which can detract from good practice in developing effective projects and programmes. The following therefore draws on learning from other economic growth and regeneration programmes which do not have these similar restrictions, and explores approaches and features which have supported engagement and effective project development. The purpose of the narrative is to present ideas and options which could be drawn upon to further develop Greater Lincolnshire TA offer or approach moving forwards. The Greater London Authority's (GLA) Good Growth Fund has been frequently cited as one of the few capital regeneration funds nationally which operates without ERDF restrictions.

The role of community-based advisors / outreach support

The provision of flexible revenue resource has been identified as one of the key success factors of the GLLEP TA. Other programmes have adopted a similar approach, although increasing the intensity of the support by using locally based community or area advisers to support local engagement, capacity building and facilitate project development. The GLA for instance, employs Area Officers whose remit is to provide an external and impartial sounding board to local delivery partners and provide advice to raise the quality of project propositions. Area Officers have a detailed understanding of local needs and provide a

bridge between local delivery partners and funders. They provide an accessible 'frontline' resource able to use their technical knowledge and thematic expertise to raise the capacity of local delivery partners and support project development.

Regular meetings of Area Officers provide an opportunity to form a strategic view of project development activity across London and broker relationships between partners where relevant. Area Officers can also use their local knowledge to ensure that projects are integrated into wider area-based investments such as Creative Enterprise Zones across the city. The Officers have been instrumental in the effective delivery of the GLA's Good Growth Fund which provides capital funding to support the development of enterprise, skills, and community infrastructure.

The Application of Co-design Principles

Co-design is a participatory approach which seeks to include all stakeholders in the design of service and product solutions. The rationale for co-design is that interventions are designed based on a better understanding of needs; there is more innovation and exchange of ideas which leads to better projects; implementation risks are minimised; and the process of co-design helps to raise the capacity and understanding of those involved.

Co-design can be done informally or formally drawing on a range of consultation techniques including one to one consultation, surveys, stakeholder engagement events, or workshops for instance. The approach has been adopted by numerous programmes where evaluation evidence has identified the following good practice:

- Using a combination of different engagement methods which are tailored to each stakeholder group;
- Providing sufficient time for project revision and refinement post co-design;
- Mapping all stakeholder groups prior to co-design to ensure all perspectives are reflected;
- Being open minded about potential solutions and change; and,
- Building in mechanisms to maintain stakeholder engagement through implementation phases.

The approach however requires a sufficient period of time to be allocated to project and programme development which is not always possible when competitive funding is sought. There remains value however in investing in these approaches in order to respond to competitive funds, as well as prepare the way for exploration of other possible investment options.

Technical Support Panels

As well as community-based / outreach resource outlined above, revenue resource more generally has been identified as being important in raising the quality of project and

programme applications – something which is critical in Greater Lincolnshire, and which connects to the area's wider aspirations.

Several programmes provide access to pre-approved or pre-procured contractors who can be accessed by delivery partners requiring technical support. This might include architects and designers, costs consultants, engineers, or economic specialists for instance. These panels help to speed up the project development process, ease procurement for delivery organisations, and ensure access to high quality supply networks.

As part of the London Mayor's ambitions to promote high quality, sustainable design in all capital investments across the City of London, the GLA retains a design panel who are required to provide input to all capital investment proposals. The panel advises on the potential adoption of sustainable design principles, opportunities for greening, and improved accessibility, as well as any other relevant design features. Although most project sponsors are initially skeptical regarding the role of the panel, the majority find external expert input to be additive, and modifications to enhance the quality of schemes are frequently made following the panel's input. The panel has been particularly important in advising on the integration of sustainable development principles which support net zero ambitions.

Development Funds

Development funding has been effectively used across programmes to progress interventions which have merit but are not quite ready for investment. The GLA's Good Growth Fund has provided funding of up to £50,000 to projects not meeting investment requirements to improve the quality of their proposal, refine the business case and procure additional technical support where required. The Fund has been instrumental in creating an inclusive fund by supporting organisations less familiar with competitive funds to raise their capacity, and also encouraging more innovation in project design by providing delivery organisations with the time and space to refine and improve their project proposals.

Organisational Capacity Building and Adoption of Better Business Case Principles

Creating an effective business case is critical to securing funding and strategic buy-in. However, few public sector organisations have sufficient expertise to lead this process, and due to inconsistencies in the quality of business cases submitted to government, HM Treasury now encourage the adoption of a standard five case approach. Upskilling staff in the adoption of Better Business Case principles can be an effective way to support case making and effective decision making, with LCC currently investing in foundation stage CIPFA Better Business Case training for staff.

Training provided by APMG provides insight into how to apply the five-case model and the different types of business cases; explains the lifecycle of a business case; and provides trainees with a structure and approach to support the development of more effective investment propositions. This training can however be expensive and in order to be

effective, needs to be applied regularly and ideally under the guidance of someone who is familiar with the approach until expertise is developed. Mentoring and coaching relationships therefore work well when this capability is not held within one organisation, as does training combined with a commitment to become part of a learning support network.

Networking and Knowledge Transfer

A considerable amount of knowledge and expertise is held within an area's anchor institutions and key stakeholder groups. Unlocking this through mechanisms for both formal and informal knowledge exchange and networking can build a body of evidence regarding 'what works' whilst also preventing duplication of effort and 'reinventing the wheel'. Often knowledge exchange relies on personal contacts, but creating new structures or processes for more formal knowledge changes can help to bring a broader range of partners together. Approaches often include:

- Practitioner forums specifically supporting project development and access to funding which bring together operational level staff across a locality;
- Communities of Practice which are usually smaller groups of partners who meet regularly to share their experiences. These Communities are intended to provide a safe environment to pool expertise, learn from other practitioners/staff and find solutions to common challenges;
- Mentoring relationships; and,
- Virtual bulletin boards, forums or websites where partners can post questions and share experiences. However, these formats require moderation and management.

Mission-led Approaches

In an attempt to address some of society's most pressing problems, mission-led approaches are becoming an increasingly important feature of national policy and regional strategies. Rather than partners focusing on the development of a specific sector or locality in isolation, mission-led approaches bring together a range of partners around a common problem with a view to collectively developing a tailored solution. In addition to providing scope for more innovation and ideation, this approach is highly outcome focused and builds partner support and buy-in from the start. It also facilitates organisational capacity building through knowledge transfer and the meeting of uncommon partners.

This approach has often been adopted to drive technical innovation within supply chains or businesses but is now becoming increasingly popular within broader policy fields. The approach tends to facilitate a more strategic and potentially transformative solution, bringing together a wider range of stakeholders which may cut across political and geographical boundaries and sectors. It can therefore be highly additive to locally targeted interventions. The approach is aligned with commissioning models, although provides greater flexibility for partners to agree the 'mission'.

Partnering and Place-Based Impact Investing

To counter the restrictions of EU funding streams, local and regional partners are increasingly exploring new funding mechanisms which draw on the expertise of institutional investors to support the project development process and knowledge transfer.

Whilst traditional finance is focused on financial returns and therefore does not always deliver the social, economic, and environmental outcomes sought by public partners, Place-based impact investing (PBII) is an emerging investment approach which encourages new and productive partnerships between places and financial institutions. It brings together capital from multiple sources to finance projects which improve people's lives and wider economic and environmental systems while generating a financial return.

PBII is founded on a strong, collaborative, and long-term partnership between a financial institution and places (typically county or city-level public institutions). Partners work together to identify a package of linked interventions which can yield financial as well as wider returns. Emerging research undertaken by Metro Dynamics in partnership with the Impact Investing Institute and Lloyd's Banking Group, has sought to test PBII approaches. The research suggests that at a system-wide level, PBII requires:

- Collaboration that emphasises long-term impact, usually governed by an overarching body involving all partners on a place-by-place basis;
- Leadership and buy-in from the place being targeted, with local representation and engagement;
- Portfolio investment that activates a series of linked interventions in a place and crowds in other funders, projects, and transactions as the relationship matures. This relies therefore on places being able to clearly articulate to potential investors what they are seeking to achieve and provide details of projects they wish to progress; and,
- Impact measurement, transparency, and information sharing.

PBII relies on an effective and collaborative relationship to work in practice. Done right, the PBII relationship in effect becomes a new 'shared space' which brings together relevant partners with the language, tools, and access to progress the approach and create real impact in places. This can therefore address capacity and capability constraints within partner organisations, particularly in relation to the commercial and economic viability of projects.

Partnering to develop and deliver a PBII portfolio means sharing capacity and insights to create meaningful and additive opportunities. The collaborative element requires genuine sharing and honesty, but creates mutual learning from and accountability for results. A PBII partnership could take a number of forms, from informal knowledge exchange to formalised organisational commitments and secondments.

3 Project Performance

Introduction

Chapter three tracks contracting and provides an overview of the financial and output performance of the project.

Key Findings

- The project assisted more schemes than anticipated but event activity was hindered by the Brexit referendum and pandemic which reduced the number of ERDF calls and restricted the delivery of in-person events.
- Overall, the findings suggest that the scope and scale of target outputs would have been appropriate under normal operating conditions, and the programme has performed well given these external constraints.
- Beneficiaries expressed high levels of satisfaction with the nature and quality of support, and the project has delivered better value for money than the original contract envisaged.
- The evidence indicates that the programme logic model and underpinning assumptions are valid.

Financial Performance

Contracting

Lincolnshire County Council secured £251,364 of ERDF revenue investment in 2016. This was matched by £167,574 of public sector match from LCC to provide total project funding of £418,938 (Table 1). The contract commenced in 2016 and ended in 2020 following a contract extension granted in 2019.

Table 1. Project Funding by Source and Year (original contract)

Source	2016 (£)	2017 (£)	2018 (£)	Total (£)
LCC Match	59,848	61,088	46,638	167,574
ERDF	89,773	91,633	69,958	251,364
TOTAL	**149,621**	**152,721**	**116,596**	**418,938**

Source: Grant Funding Agreement

In 2017, two contract variations were agreed. The first reduced total funding to £324,801 due to reduced expenditure on salaries and the removal of marketing and consultancy costs, and the second reprofiled expenditure (Table 2).

Table 2. Project Funding by Source and Year (following contract variations)

Source	2016 (£)	2017 (£)	2018 (£)	Total (£)
LCC Match	27,784	42,083	60,054	129,921
ERDF	41,675	63,123	90,082	194,880
TOTAL	**69,459**	**105,206**	**150,136**	**324,801**

Source: Grant Funding Agreement

The contracted output profile remained as outlined in Table 3.

Table 3. Output Targets

Output	2016	2017	2018	Total Outputs
No. projects supported to submit an application	11	8	6	**25**
No. dissemination events held	6	6	4	**16**
No. attendees at dissemination events	100	80	60	**240**

Source: Grant Funding Agreement

The variation was requested to reflect the delayed start to the project and reduced staffing costs associated with this. The delay was partly a result of the Brexit referendum and purdah, as well as staffing changes within LCC. The project was still however expected to deliver against planned outputs which remained unchanged.

Contract Extension

In 2019, an extension to the contract was granted which moved the agreed financial and practical completion rate to December 2020, with final claims to be submitted by January 2021. This increased total project funding to £499,265 as outlined below:

Table 4. Project Funding by Source and Year (contract extension)

Source	2016 (£)	2017 (£)	2018 (£)	2019 (£)	2020(£)	Total (£)
LCC Match	30,342	38,362	36,711	46,462	47,828	199,705
ERDF	45,514	57,545	55,067	69,693	71,741	299,560
TOTAL	**75,856**	**95,907**	**91,778**	**116,155**	**119,569**	**499,265**

Source: Grant Funding Agreement

The contracted output profile changed (Table 5) as MHCLG requested the addition of training event outputs to differentiate between the promotional focus of the dissemination events and the technical assistance provided for specific calls (e.g. low carbon).

Table 5. Output Targets

Output	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total Outputs
No. projects supported to submit an application	18	1	5	4	7	35
No. dissemination events held	8	12	1	8	3	32
No. attendees at dissemination events	152	187	11	110	35	495
Training events held				3		3
No. of attendees at training events				60		60

Source: Grant Funding Agreement

Project Expenditure

The project defrayed 87% of planned expenditure with the shortfall due to the reduced number of calls as a result of the pandemic and a significant reduction in salary costs due to one of the two full time posts leaving the authority in October 2019 (Table 6).

Table 6. Expenditure by Year

Expenditure (£)	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Planned (£)	75,856	95,907	91,778	116,155	119,569	499,265
Actual (£)	69,459	102,305	91,788	99,514	73,270	436,335
% of Plan Figure Achieved	**92%**	**107%**	**100%**	**86%**	**61%**	**87%**

Source: LCC programme monitoring data

The profile of expenditure is broadly as anticipated although marketing was undertaken by staff through dissemination events and targeted engagement, therefore a separate budget for promotional or publicity materials has not been required. LCC also utilised the existing promotional channels of Business Lincolnshire and GLLEP which did not incur cost (Table 7).

Table 7. Total Project Expenditure

	Total Planned Expenditure (£)	Actual Expenditure (£)	% of Total
Salaries	403,596	357,509	89
Indirect costs	60,540	53,626	89
Other revenue	9,129	5,199	57
Professional fees	22,000	20,000	91
Marketing	4,000	0	0
Total	**499,265**	**436,335**	**87**

Source: MHCLG contract and programme monitoring data

Output Delivery

The delivery of TAP outputs has been reliant on the wider ERDF programme being delivered as anticipated. The 2019 contract extension was granted as there had been fewer calls than anticipated within the original contract timeframe and further calls were expected in 2020. However, the Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on delivery and resulted in MHCLG not progressing some planned calls which reduced the need for TA support. Despite the pandemic however, the project supported more schemes than anticipated and secured good attendance at events prior to the pandemic (Table 8).

Table 8. Output Performance

Output Indicator	Target	Actual	% of Target Achieved	Comments
No. of projects supported to submit an application	35	38	108	Target exceeded
No. of dissemination events held	32	23	72	Covid meant MHCLG reduced the number of application calls which therefore reduced the need for promotional events
No. of attendees at dissemination events	495	379	76	As above
Training events held	3	1	33	As above
No. of attendees at training events	60	10	17	As above

Source: LCC claims data provided to MHCLG

Value for Money

Based on total expenditure of £436,335, the project has delivered the following unit costs:

- Delivered 38 assists at a cost of £11,483 per assist;
- Delivered 23 dissemination events at a cost of £18,971 per event; and,
- Engaged 389 attendees at dissemination and training events at a cost of £1,121 per attendee.

Actual unit costs are lower than planned in original contract assumptions, which approved a budget of £418,938 to deliver the following unit costs:

- £16,757 per assist;
- £26,183 per dissemination event; and,
- £1,745 per attendee at dissemination events.

The project has therefore delivered better value for money than anticipated. Although not directly comparable, unit costs for other TA programmes suggests that how and where delivery occurs has a bearing on VfM. For instance, projects in urban areas such as the Black Country and South East Midlands are typically able to achieve lower unit costs, with an assist in the SEMLEP area costing £4,115 and an event costing £13,375. Some rural areas such as the East Riding have also been able to achieve lower unit costs by combining the ERDF and ESF TA to provide economies of scale. In the East Riding, an assist has cost £7,512 and an event has cost £6,286. In all cases however, it is important that programmes are tailored to needs, and given the capacity constraints within Greater Lincolnshire and the dispersed geography, it has been appropriate to adopt an intensive approach based on the provision of flexible, one-to-one advice and guidance rather than lighter-touch technical support.

4 Project Delivery

Introduction

Chapter four considers the approach to TAP delivery and management, and the benefits created.

Key Findings

- Management, administration and delivery processes have been fit for purpose and appropriate to the scope and scale of the intervention.
- The ESIF Committee has provided an effective forum to ensure delivery against strategic programme objectives and bring together key partners. TAP has provided a bridge between local and strategic stakeholders to support decision-making.
- Engagement processes have been highly effective resulting in good take-up of funding opportunities and a good pipeline of investible propositions. Events have been well received and have provided an opportunity for networking as well as information sharing.
- One to one advisory support has been an important component of the support offer. In addition to technical support, an external perspective on the project provided critical review and an external stimulus to encourage applicants to question their project assumptions. TAP staff have also helped to bring projects forward where there were gaps in the pipeline.
- TAP has provided more advisory support than originally envisaged. As a result, the team have been more proactively involved in improving and shaping projects, which has proved beneficial.
- Future delivery of TA could consider opportunities for more direct commissioning and 'packaging' of interventions; promoting examples of good practice and case studies; the use of hybrid and online delivery methods; targeting capacity building in growth areas such as net zero; opportunities to strategically align funds; and earlier intervention and follow-up support.

Project Management

Management and Administration

Project management and administration processes have been delivered in line with good practice and appropriate to the scope and scale of the project.

As an important project for Greater Lincolnshire, TAP has been overseen by the Head of Service at LCC and delivered by two full time staff comprising a Project Manager and Project Officer who have been responsible for service delivery as well as contract management and administration.

As the Accountable Body for the ERDF programme LCC has considerable experience in the management of ERDF interventions, therefore robust project monitoring and management processes have been in place to track beneficiary engagement, service delivery, benefits realisation and financial management.

Although there were staffing changes throughout delivery, most notably the Project Manager moving to a new role in the final year, this did not negatively impacted delivery, and caseloads have been manageable given the reduced number of application calls issued.

The LCC delivery team built a good working relationship with GLLEP which ensured a joined-up approach to delivery.

Governance

The ESIF Committee was established to oversee delivery of the ESIF Strategy and ERDF programme. The Committee provided an effective forum to ensure delivery against strategic programme objectives and bring together key partners. The private sector chair has been instrumental in steering Committee meetings, encouraging the partner engagement and feeding back to the GLLEP Investment Board. The diverse composition of the Committee has ensured a variety of perspectives have been reflected in the assessment of projects.

TAP staff played a pivotal role in monthly ESIF Committee meetings, providing a bridge between local delivery partners and strategic stakeholders. Their detailed knowledge of funding propositions assisted the Committee's decision-making process, and helped strategic partners understand the local significance of interventions where required. TAP also played an important role in avoiding duplication and advising on 'need' when calls were significantly over-subscribed. Several stakeholders commented that TAP staff were able to 'bring projects to life' for partners and ensure there was an awareness of local context when key decisions were being made.

Project Delivery and Design

Engagement

Engagement processes were highly effective resulting in good take-up of funding opportunities and a good pipeline of investible propositions. The delivery team tapped into LCC and other delivery partners networks to promote the programme, and the team was supported by good working relationships already in place with several district councils and the university.

Organisations typically came to hear about Technical Assistance via different means and at different stages of the project development process. For instance,

- Some organisations had strong relationships with the European funding team at LCC and were therefore aware of TA from the outset.
- The Lincoln Open Research and Innovation Centre (LORIC) project was signposted to TA at an information workshop held by MHCLG.
- The City of Lincoln Council were directly approached by LCC due to a shortage in environmental projects.
- The teams at South Kesteven and North Kesteven each had separate ideas for projects but due to resource issues these ideas were never taken forward. The projects were brought together by TAP, combining ideas to form one project, with the Environment Agency and National Trust brought in as stakeholders.

The delivery of promotional workshops in a variety of accessible locations across the GLLEP area, as well as marketing of ERDF opportunities through Greater Lincolnshire networks and communication channels, ensured funding calls were widely communicated. Although most applicants have a pipeline of projects they are looking to progress, they rely on the right funding opportunities coming forward and are not necessarily actively searching for funding on an on-going basis. Proactive outreach to raise awareness of new opportunities is therefore welcomed.

Events have been well received and have provided an opportunity for networking as well as information sharing. The opportunity to put questions to funders early in the process provided assurance regarding the suitability of ERDF investment and informed project design. By providing potential applicants assurance at an early stage in the process, events prevented time being incurred on ineligible propositions, and enabled applicants to progress feasibility work.

"It (the workshop) gives that assurance. It meant I could get around £100,000 of technical, feasibility work signed off so we could progress the project". ERDF applicant

Events were well managed, with the showcasing of best practice examples and sector and thematic breakouts highlighted as being helpful to share common experiences and understand requirements. Across the project, stakeholders felt that the level of communication and engagement was good.

Advisory Support

One-to-one advisory support has been an important component of the support offer. All projects are different and are being applied in different contexts, therefore the opportunity to discuss their project with someone was highly valued by applicants. In addition to

technical support, an external perspective on the project provided critical review and an external stimulus to encourage applicants to question their project assumptions.

The knowledge and capability of TAP staff has been critical to effective delivery, and stakeholders valued their input. The team have good technical knowledge of ERDF funding and the local policy and operating context, as well as expertise in bid writing and project development. Ability to lever the delivery team's wider contacts and networks enabled potential applicants to access a wider pool of expertise where relevant. By having oversight of all propositions, the team were able to make project connections where appropriate.

Advisory support has been flexible and tailored to need, therefore applicants have been able to shape support as required and access when needed. As bid writing is an iterative process, the flexibility to access advisory support as required and to have a clear point of contact for queries was welcomed by delivery partners. The team have also been praised for their ability to interpret and 'de-mystify' the ERDF process.

The extent of TA support varied between projects, largely determined by how much in-house experience the project development team had. Engagement took place in person before the pandemic, but during lockdown restrictions was limited to phone and email. The uptake in the use of video conferencing was noted as a positive adaption, as it enabled applications to be collectively reviewed in detail via screen share.

The introduction of training events following the 2019 contract extension was identified as a useful addition to the support offer, but which wasn't able to be fully tested due to Covid and a reduction in the number of calls. The principle of targeted assistance to address knowledge or capability gaps however was supported.

It was noted that TAP provided more advisory support than was originally envisaged as there was initially some uncertainty regarding the level of assistance MHCLG would directly provide, and how much would need to be delivered locally. As a result, the team have been more proactively involved in improving and shaping projects, rather than simply providing advice and guidance on ERDF rules and regulations, which has offered considerable added value. High turnover of staff within MHCLG also resulted in the TAP team undertaking more initial engagement work with projects than expected, with the team's local knowledge and opportunity to build good working relationships from the start identified as key areas of added value.

With hindsight, the more extensive role of the TAP team has proved beneficial in terms of providing more direct support to projects, but also providing a greater understanding of interventions which has enabled the team to provide more detailed advice to the ESIF Committee.

Delivery of Horizontal Principles

Horizontal principles were integrated into the TAP delivery model and advisory support. The proactive approach to securing engagement in the ESIF programme outlined above

embedded equality principles into delivery and ensured there was broad awareness of funding opportunities and potential delivery partners were not excluded from applying. The provision of intensive advisory support to those organisations new to ERDF funding further supported equality of opportunity. The delivery team also proactively engaged delivery partners to support the progression of low carbon projects which aligned with ESIF sustainable development principles, and offered additional training/advisory support in the form of a workshop to facilitate knowledge transfer on low carbon and environmentally sustainable interventions. Furthermore, all applicants were made aware of the need for cross cutting themes to be considered as part of the project development and application process, and advice was provided to support this.

Good Practice

Stakeholders identified several features of the delivery model as being particularly important to the project's overall success:

- A clear strategy and governance structure was deemed important to ensure the ERDF programme delivered against local objectives and priorities. At a strategic level, this helped to ensure local projects were strategically aligned and worked as a programme of activity. As the bridge between local and strategic partners, TAP staff played an important role in ensuring strategic alignment.
- Given that TAP needs to provide a bridge between local and strategic stakeholders, knowledge and understanding of local issues, challenges, delivery structures and activities is a 'must have' for TAP delivery staff.
- The flexibility of the support offer has worked well and has enabled the delivery team to be responsive to needs as and when they arise.
- Proactive targeting of organisations alongside a broad based promotional and marketing campaign has supported engagement and enabled the TAP team to work more collaboratively with partners and bring forward projects to address gaps.

The key factors which have hindered delivery have been external and beyond the control of the project. The Brexit referendum and Covid pandemic reduced the number of calls and impacted the delivery of workshops and training events; while the short timescales to respond to funding calls impacted the ability of partners to develop more innovative or collaborative solutions.

One applicant noted being unsure about the authority of the TAP team to advise on ERDF issues and the nature of the relationship with MHCLG. Clarity regarding the level of assurance the TAP team can provide was identified as being particularly important if applicants are exposing themselves to financial risks as a result of the advice.

Improving Future Delivery

Overall, the findings suggest that the TAP offer and approach to delivery has been appropriate given support needs, and has provided an effective sounding board for applicants. The level of communication has been good, and the delivery team have been proactive in terms of their outreach activities and information sharing. Feedback suggests that the scope and scale of support available was appropriate, however it was noted that technical assistance cannot counter the lack of business case expertise within the GLLEP area, and although it facilitates the rollout of specific funds, there remains a need to raise capacity to respond to competitive funding opportunities and better share knowledge between delivery partners.

Consultees made the following suggestions regarding opportunities to enhance the future delivery of technical assistance for major funds:

Innovation: current funding restrictions can stifle innovation, but TAP can play a key role in helping delivery organisations develop more innovative schemes whilst still providing assurance to funders regarding deliverability.

Packaged interventions and partnerships: there is a risk with competitive funding programmes that a series of individual transactions are funded as partners are reluctant to collaborate. TAP can support the development or facilitate the commissioning of packages of complementary interventions which collectively deliver greater impact. TAP could also play a role in ensuring that smaller or less experienced organisations are able to secure funding through partnership approaches.

Reaching people in a 'new world': although TAP secured good levels of engagement through workshops and outreach activities, it was commented that future programmes will need to reflect on how to reach and engage people using more hybrid techniques. With more people working remotely, online delivery is likely to be more important than in the past.

Case studies: developing a portfolio of case studies showcasing good examples of project design, development and delivery processes could help to share knowledge in an accessible format.

Building capacity and capability in growth areas: although net zero agendas now underpin most national policies, this has been highlighted as an area where there is less project development capability within the GLLEP area and therefore could be targeted for specific capacity building support, training or facilitated partnership working. Consideration should also be given to ensuring local partners are attuned to Levelling Up, inclusive growth and social value agendas as well.

Strategic alignment of funding: whilst it is recognised that this is not always possible because of how funding is distributed and to whom, several consultees noted that an ability

to combine funding streams at a strategic level provides more flexibility to develop a strategic pipeline of investment propositions and vary intervention rates where required. At a basic level, an understanding of the funds available and any overlap would be helpful to identify opportunities to better align these.

Earlier intervention and follow-up support: opportunities to work with projects during the development stage as well as post-award to support early implementation.

Brokerage: TA is restricted in its ability to provide legal support, which is a key requirement for most applicants, therefore brokerage of relevant expertise is important. TAP is also limited to the technical details of the funding opportunity, and it was noted that although delivery staff were very knowledgeable, they cannot always advise on the technical details of all projects. An ability to act as a gateway into other technical advice e.g. highways, waterways etc. is therefore important.

Benefits and Impact

Strategic Impacts

Many of the benefits of TAP have been felt at a strategic level and confirm the assumptions within the project logic model. These include:

- Increased awareness of the ERDF programme at a local level and good levels of take-up. TAP was able to proactively target potential delivery partners and put measures in place to address gaps in the project portfolio (e.g. low carbon and climate adaption opportunities).
- The ESIF Committee have had an improved understanding of local strategic priorities and pipeline projects, with direct support available to bring projects to life and understand their local significance.
- Whilst not fully attributable to TAP, the GLLEP area has been able to successfully bring forward a broad portfolio of projects to support delivery of the ESIF strategy and has started to increase its delivery expertise in relation to low carbon interventions.
- There is some evidence that TAP has supported the potential for collaboration in project development, although a large proportion of projects are already relatively well developed when they engage with the programme. This has been identified as a key opportunity for TA moving forwards if there is scope to engage with projects at an early stage as well as consider the use of commissioning models or collaborative mission-led project development approaches.

In addition to confirming the outcomes and impacts assumed within the project logic model, TAP has also improved the strategic alignment of applications to ensure delivery against GLLEP objectives, and has provided direct knowledge sharing between partners.

The Role of TAP in Addressing Programme Gaps - The City of Lincoln: Growing Environmental Resilience Project

TAP directly approached the Council to bring forward the Growing Environmental Resilience Project due to a shortage in environmental schemes, and the City Council had a pipeline of suitable projects which would meet eligibility criteria.

The Council was able to put forward three projects delivering woodland, grassland and water environment enhancements in partnership with agencies including the Wildlife Trust and Environment Agency.

TAP supported the Council in the development of the Strategic Outline Case but was less involved in the full submission as Lincoln City Council are experienced in applying for ERDF. Despite this, the team found the ERDF guidance confusing as there were multiple versions. TAP was able to provide clarifications on the guidance as well as advice on completion of the application annexes. Without intervention the Council's team would have had to spend longer on the application process, and would have had less assurance regarding funding success.

Moving forward it was noted that with inclusive growth more firmly embedded in national and local policy, there is a need to develop capability in calculating environmental outputs and outcomes which are deemed to be more challenging than traditional job and GVA impacts for which there are tried and tested approaches.

Project and Applicant-Level Impacts

Consultations with applicants does not suggest TAP has resulted in fundamental changes to projects or the organisation's approach to project development in the majority of instances, but has supported incremental changes and knowledge enhancements. These primarily include:

- Interpreting funder requirements and providing assurance: in many instances applicants required assurance that their interpretation or understanding of ERDF requirements and regulations was correct. In some instances however, applicants had a gap in their understanding regarding how to articulate their case or respond to MHCLG queries which TAP assisted with.
- Articulating strategic fit: TAP ensured that there was a strong strategic fit between projects and ESIF objectives. Whilst this didn't necessarily result in significant revision of projects, it helped applicants to meet the requirements of a five-case model by ensuring projects were articulated in a way which was aligned with funder requirements.
- Accessing technical expertise: TAP staff were able to use their networks and contacts to put applicants in touch with relevant technical and subject-matter experts. In these

instances, TAP indirectly supported the progression of projects by facilitating feasibility work, site/technical assessments, or design enhancements.

For applicants with very limited ERDF experience however, TAP support has been more impactful and has played a more fundamental role in supporting the organisation to access funding. The Wrangle Sea Bank project for instance has utilised TAP as it was the applicant's first time accessing ERDF funding so they were unfamiliar with the process and initially found it cumbersome and complex. In addition to the provision of on-going advice on the application process and ERDF requirements, the flexibility of TAP staff to answer ad hoc queries was particularly welcomed. It was suggested however that for organisations new to ERDF, greater clarity from the start regarding anticipated time and resource inputs and what the application process entails, would have been helpful.

Schemes that are highly technical in nature or more complex (e.g. major infrastructure schemes rather than revenue support programmes for instance) may also find TAP support to be more additive and benefit from external input.

Advisory Support to West Lindsey BC Gainsborough Marina Project

Although it didn't receive funding, the Gainsborough Marina Project application received support from TAP. The project was to create an extension to the River Trent Blue Green infrastructure through the provision of a Marina and associated green space; regenerating existing brownfield land in Gainsborough. The marina project has been a long-term aspiration of the council, but at the time of the ERDF call, it still required technical input to test feasibility.

TAP support was crucial in developing the project. Even though it was ultimately unsuccessful, the guidance received was useful and provoked a fundamental shift in how the Council consider projects and the importance of focusing on project need and why the funder would support it. For instance, biodiversity was not originally a major component of the scheme, but additional features were added (a fish nursery) to better align with ERDF outputs.

TAP staff were able to broker contact with the waterway's teams at LCC who were fundamental to the project's development. The workshop process was also helpful as it provided in person, interactive support. As a result of the support received, the Council was able to commit funding to feasibility work which enabled them to progress the technical phase of the project development process.

Although TAP has primarily resulted in incremental knowledge enhancements at an individual level, by helping organisations to successfully access ERDF, TAP indirectly supports the longer-term growth and development of organisations as they build their delivery credentials and capabilities. As a result, applicants will be better placed to design and develop investable propositions in the future. This is particularly the case for smaller

authorities that have less capacity to put forward proposals for large investment schemes. In North and South Kesteven for instance, TAP helped to facilitate a partnership approach which enabled both authorities to access funding for the Witham/Slea Blue Green Corridor.

The Witham/Slea Blue Green Corridor

The Witham/Slea Blue Green Corridor is a partnership project between South Kesteven District Council, North Kesteven District Council, the Environment Agency (EA), and National Trust to create and improve river environments, enhancing habitat and creating a sustainable environment for wildlife and people to enjoy.

The project was developed in response to ERDF funding as neither the District Council nor the LEP had a pipeline of environmental projects they could put forward for funding.

The teams at South Kesteven and North Kesteven each had separate ideas for projects but due to capacity issues within the District Councils, these ideas were never taken forward. TAP and the ERDF opportunity played a role in bringing the ideas together to form one project, with the EA and National Trust brought in as stakeholders.

Lots of engagement was held between the partners to improve the project and its development, with the EA supporting the development of environmental techniques and outputs. The application for ERDF funding was completed internally by South Kesteven and North Kesteven District Councils, and a project manager and project assistant were brought in to support the delivery phase.

TAP was utilised from the very beginning of the ERDF application as the teams at South Kesteven and North Kesteven District Councils had strong relationships with the European funding team at LCC. They were engaged by the County Council from the start and were invited to a number of workshops on ERDF funding which explained the process of applying and support needed. Both South Kesteven and North Kesteven District Councils found this to be very valuable as the application process was 'difficult' and 'complicated'. Without the workshops, consultees thought it unlikely that the project would have continued in its current form.

The TA team were the first port of call for the District Councils and were able to answer most questions that they had on ERDF guidance, but which MHCLG were unable to advise on. This ability to interpret the guidance was therefore particularly helpful. TAP staff kept them up to date on deadlines and were very responsive. Where questions were unable to be answered by TA, the District Councils were directed to other sources, such as the University of Hull.

Localised TA support was deemed to be important because it is able to bring together ideas from across the County and drive support for propositions within local authorities and from external stakeholders, such as the EA and National Trust. Without the support

from TA, neither District Councils would have been able to put forward a project as they couldn't afford to meet the grant threshold.

Additionally, it was noted that TA helps small projects and smaller local authorities to access funding, though this also depends on the commitment of the individual/team putting forward the project. TA therefore particularly benefits those without the big pockets and capacity of larger authorities.

5 Conclusions

Key Findings

Programme Relevance and Design

The findings suggest the programme design was appropriate and there was a clear rationale for intervention. There are knowledge and capability gaps within the GLLEP area which, without intervention, would restrict delivery partner's ability to bring forward compliant ERDF applications which meet both national and local priorities and policy objectives.

The TA programme played an important role in making potential delivery partners aware of ERDF funding opportunities, de-mystifying the application process, and providing a responsive point of contact to deal with application queries. There was clear demand for support from partners, and the assistance was well received.

The blend of one-to-one advisory support and workshop events provided an appropriate level of flexibility to tailor support to individual needs whilst still achieving economies of scale through one-to-many events exploring more generic issues.

Whilst training provision was not fully tested, there remains a need to raise delivery partners' capacity to deliver Green Book compliant business cases as well as to build delivery capability and understanding in key policy areas linked to inclusive and sustainable growth agendas e.g. low carbon.

There is also a strong strategic rationale for TAP to provide a bridge between applicants and strategic decision makers. In line with the programme logic model, TAP has been a valuable resource for the ESIF Committee to increase their understanding of local needs and priorities, and understand the significance of project proposals.

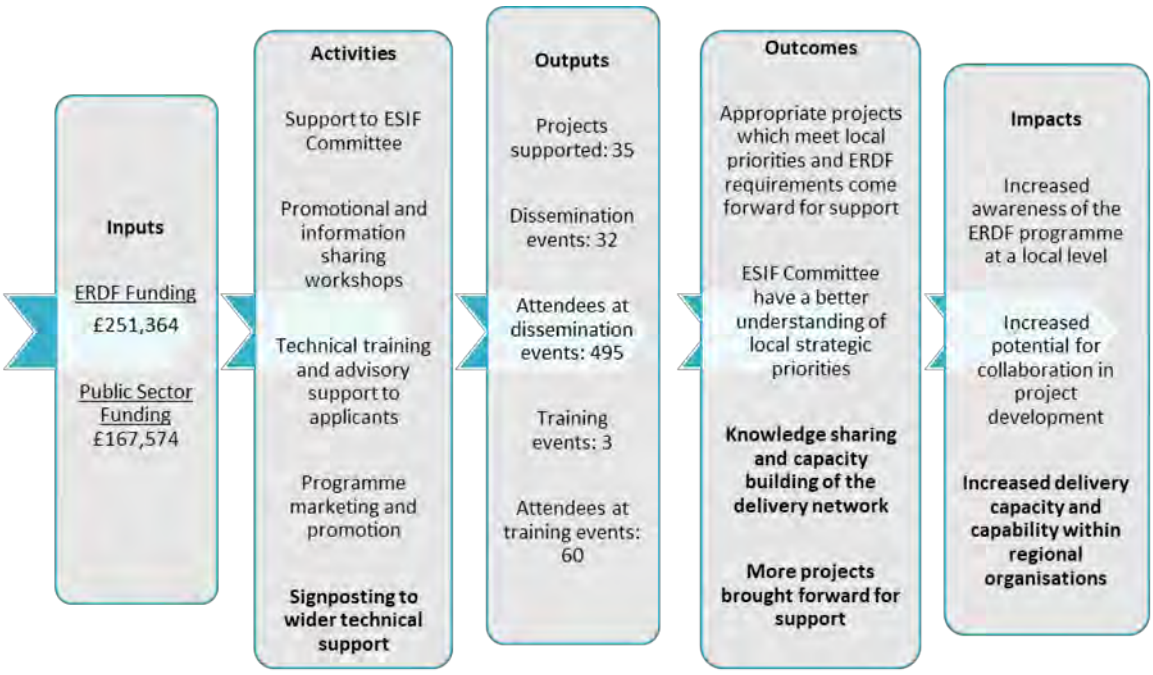
Programme Performance

The programme has assisted more projects than anticipated but has slightly underperformed against the delivery of dissemination/training events and attendee numbers. This is primarily due to the Brexit referendum and pandemic which reduced the number of ERDF calls and restricted the delivery of in person events.

Overall, the findings suggest that the scope and scale of target outputs would have been appropriate under normal operating conditions, and the programme has performed well given these external constraints. Beneficiaries have expressed high levels of satisfaction with the nature and quality of support, and actual unit costs have been below original contract assumptions.

The evidence indicates that the programme logic model and underpinning assumptions are valid although with the following additions outlined in bold below.

Figure 2. Revised Project Logic Model



The findings suggest the programme has delivered against its strategic objectives; successfully raising awareness of ERDF funding opportunities, encouraging good levels of take-up, improving the ESIF Committee's understanding of local priorities and projects, and supporting the development of a broad portfolio of interventions including the facilitation of collaborative interventions.

At an operational level, the programme has provided assurance regarding ERDF rules and regulations to ensure eligible and compliant projects have some forward for investment. Advisory support has led to incremental changes and enhancements within project design and improved scheme promotor's personal knowledge e.g. articulating strategic fit across the majority of projects supported. Assistance has however been particularly additive for smaller organisations with less delivery capacity, organisations new to ERDF, and those with complex, large scale and less well-developed schemes.

Programme Delivery

Management, administration and delivery processes have been fit for purpose, aligned with good practice, and appropriate to the scope and scale of the intervention. Key success factors which should be noted for future programmes include:

- Balancing a broad-based promotional campaign with targeted engagement activities to address gaps in the project portfolio. TAP has successfully brought projects forward that

otherwise would not have sought funding by making targeted project requests and working with partners to construct eligible interventions or package smaller projects.

- Providing a flexible and tailored advisory service which is responsive and can be accessed as required. Delivery staff therefore need to be 100% funded. With many of the issues which have challenged delivery being external to the project e.g. the Brexit referendum and the pandemic, flexibility of staffing and delivery activities also becomes increasingly important to be able to respond to the additional support needs these issues create.
- Devoting more time and resource where projects are complex, significant in scale, less developed or being brought forward by organisations with limited bid writing experience.
- TA is restricted in its scope by delivery staff's own knowledge and expertise. Whilst this has not inhibited the delivery of support in Greater Lincolnshire, staff need to be well networked to be able to broker wider thematic and more technical support when required.
- Local knowledge is vital as delivery staff need to be able to adapt their advice to the local operating context and needs, as well as be in a position to connect relevant interventions or delivery partners where relevant to avoid duplication and achieve efficiencies.

Although several opportunities have been identified to improve the effectiveness of technical assistance moving forwards, it is evident from consultations that the way external funding programmes are designed and delivered hinders the application of good practice in project development processes. Competitive bidding and how funding is allocated reduces the incentive for applicants to collaborate and innovate. A focus on projects rather than programmes also reduces the scope for collaboration which could support knowledge transfer and capacity building across the delivery network.

Short lead-in times are challenging as they reduce the time available for project development activity and limit opportunities for funders or TA support to engage with potential applicants during the early stages of project development. Furthermore, ERDF does not support the delivery of TA post-award despite this being identified by consultees as an opportunity for added value. Therefore, the principles of co-design and co-production, which are known to support the development of more effective interventions and raise the capacity of delivery organisations, are difficult to apply in these situations.

Future Project Development

The findings suggest that overall the TA programme has responded well to the needs of the ESIF programme and has supported the successful deployment of ERDF investment within the GLLEP area. As an ERDF TA programme, support has been instrumental in helping

applicants navigate the complexity and ambiguity of European funding and has supported knowledge transfer.

As TAP has specifically responded to ERDF requirements, it is less effective as a strategic intervention to raise project development and delivery capabilities across the GLLEP area. As the funding landscape changes however, there is a rationale for rethinking how Greater Lincolnshire responds to new opportunities to ensure there is a robust pipeline of investable propositions. Furthermore, as we recover from the impacts of the pandemic, it is evident that there is a need to 'do things differently' and achieve a much better balance between economic, social and environmental objectives than in the past.

Current Constraints

Most delivery partners develop strategic investment projects internally and have pipelines in place which are at varying stages of development. Organisations will work with external partners where this is necessary, but primarily rely on personal networks as well as forums such as the GLLEP Officers Group to understand what other partners are working on.

Key challenges include the short lead-in times to competitive funds and technical capability in relation to HM Treasury's five case model, and some thematic areas which are now more commonly supported through economic and regeneration funds. However, lack of funding for development costs, continues to be a key constraint on project development and progression.

A Greater Lincolnshire Approach

As competitive funds typically limit collaboration and innovation and encourage a focus on projects rather than programmes, stakeholders have suggested that there is a need to adopt a more strategic approach to project development. Based on good practice the following features may be additive:

- A GLLEP area forum akin to the ESIF Committee to provide strategic oversight, avoid duplication of activity, as well as potentially pool / align funds where relevant.
- Identification of a prospectus of key strategic interventions which may comprise strategically significant, locally driven projects as well as cross-border/regional schemes and which can be the focus for project development activity, investment and engagement with prospective funders and investors. As some funding pots are increasingly being allocated at a local level, there is a rationale for identifying schemes which still require a more strategic response, or where a more collaborative effort may open up new funding options.
- Consideration of the potential for commissioned or targeted project development activity to bring partners together to address key Greater Lincolnshire-wide needs and gaps in the pipeline in a more innovative and collaborative way.

- Exploration of the potential to procure technical support panels where required to support the delivery of major funds.
- Potential to establish a development fund to support the progression of major schemes and investments.

Whilst partners have to be pragmatic and avoid devoting scarce resources to interventions and ideation where there are few direct funding routes, there are also benefits from moving away from reactive towards more proactive project development activity. This may facilitate engagement with the private sector and institutional investors, as well as demonstrate to Government that Greater Lincolnshire has a clear pipeline of strategic investment propositions with 'deal-based' funding on the horizon.

Knowledge Sharing

It is evident that there is considerable knowledge and expertise within the GLLEP area regarding 'what works' and the potential pitfalls and challenges associated with some interventions, but few mechanisms to pool and share this. Whilst the GLLEP Officers Group provides one forum for this, learning from elsewhere suggests consideration could be given to the development of an online forum or peer network specifically to support project development knowledge exchange, and provide a forum for partners to raise queries and access peer support or review. Time-bound mentoring or strategic advisory relationships could also be brokered to support projects at key stages of development.

Capacity Building

Based on the evaluation findings, there continues to be need and demand for the provision of one-to-one and one-to-many advisory services to inform project development, access to funding, and organisational capacity building. In addition to helping partners respond to specific funding opportunities, the findings suggest that partners also need support earlier and for longer, including after funding has been secured to support early implementation.

Whilst resource intensive, dedicated advisory staff are a key component of any support offer and provide the flexibility required by applicants whilst also offering added value through their networks and brokerage role. Based on good practice and approaches elsewhere consideration could also be given to:

- A website providing access to online resources e.g. 'How to' guides; sharing of case studies; publication of redacted business cases or sharing of sample bid responses.
- Blended upskilling and training opportunities through a workshop or masterclass training programme and/or online training provision targeting key skills in project development, bid writing and delivery, including appreciation of HM Treasury's five case model.
- Targeted training and support to address capability and knowledge gaps in relation to more environmentally and socially driven interventions.

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