

UKSPF Partnership Group

30 January 2024, 2-4pm

Erskine House, Chichester St, Belfast

Members attending

Name	Organisation	Sector
John Osborne (chair)	DLUHC	UK Govt
Celine McStravick	NICVA	Voluntary & Community
Julia Harrowsmith	NIO	UK Govt
Valerie McConville	CO3	Voluntary Community
Adrian McCreesh (by teams)	SOLACE (Mid Ulster District)	Local Govt
Lisa Toland	SOLACE (Belfast City Council)	Local Govt

Secretariat

The meeting was supported by DLUHC staff - Christine Robinson, Chris Taylor, Rebekah Bleakley, Chris Moore and Benjamin Ekpenyong (in person).

Apologies

Apologies were received from Professor Ian Greer (Queens University Belfast), John Walsh (represented by Lisa Toland) and Suzanne Wylie (Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce).

1. Chair's welcome

The Chair welcomed members and nominees to the eighth UKSPF Northern Ireland Partnership Group meeting and noted the declaration of members interests.

2. Progress since the last meeting

DLUHC and NIO officials provided an update on activities undertaken since the last meeting, including on the Northern Ireland budget position and potential implications for the fund.

2.1 Update and feedback on Economic Inactivity projects

DLUHC officials updated members on the Economic Inactivity portfolio:

- 18 funded projects now in active delivery, with £21.5m paid out to date.
- 8,666 are currently engaged, which represents 35% of the target for the whole programme.
- 1,271 people into employment represents a little over 18% of the target for the whole of the programme.
- DLUHC officials attended a 'Building an inclusive labour market' conference at the University of Ulster, alongside councils and NI departments, and convened a portfolio review workshop for projects in January (both in January).

Feedback was received from members on the programme budget, the programme evaluation and spend reprofiling. Members acknowledged the work that the DLUHC contract managers have done to support projects and help them with this.

2.2 Update - Enterprise Support Service

DLUHC and Belfast City Council (BCC) officials provided an update on the NI ESS scheme including. Officials highlighted the project has been operational since November and in the eight weeks since:

- 16,000 people have visited the Go Succeed website.
- 466 people have accessed the 1:1 advice service to develop their new business.
- 325 people have attended masterclasses.

DLUHC and BCC highlighted that in quarter four, the new grant scheme for businesses will launch as well as increased marketing and communications activity to help promote the project further.

Members recognised the wide publicity in various mediums across Northern Ireland and welcomed its launch as a much-needed service for Northern Ireland enterprises and entrepreneurs.

2.3 DfE Multiply application - update

DLUHC officials updated members on assessment of the £5.9m Multiply application from the NI Department for Economy following a UKSPF commission, which will shortly be submitted for ministerial consideration.

Members noted the changes in project size compared with the original budget – and that the project would now operate in 2024-25 only. Noting these factors, members endorsed the proposed project as making an effective contribution to UKSPF goals and Northern Ireland's needs and opportunities.

2.4 Invest NI innovation, manufacturing and sectors application - update

DLUHC officials updated members on assessment of the £11.2m package of measures designed to utilise UKSPF Supporting Local Business funding, submitted by Invest NI following a UKSPF commission, which will shortly be submitted for ministerial consideration.

Members noted the changes in project size compared with the original budget – and that the project would now operate in 2024-25 only. Noting these factors, members endorsed the proposed project as making an effective contribution to UKSPF goals and Northern Ireland's needs and opportunities.

Members provided initial observations on potential interventions that could be utilised to support people and skills and local businesses, noting that there will be available UKSPF budget should these projects be selected for funding by DLUHC ministers.

3 Current context

NIO officials provided a general overview of the current position regarding restoration of the Executive and the associated funding package, noting that details regarding the new Northern Ireland budget are not yet publicly available.

NIO officials hoped to provide a further update in the coming days, after which the Group could consider implications, where relevant, for UKSPF.

4 Future funding – post 2025

DLUHC officials invited members to provide any views on the programme as it enters its final year, and any factors that would affect delivery, noting interest from members and their wider stakeholders in any plans for funding after March 2025.

Members acknowledged the inherent challenges of planning during a likely election year, but highlighted the impact that a late announcement of future funding would have on programme delivery, including:

- Staff leaving the third sector for more secure employment in other sectors.
- Potential lasting impact on capacity of the third sector as a whole, and a reduced capacity to tackle economic inactivity in Northern Ireland.
- Reduced capacity to plan effectively and align UKSPF/UKG funded delivery with other Northern Ireland provision, especially if any future funding announcement was late in the calendar year.
- Potential delivery hiatus, negating/reducing the successful impact of UKSPF projects on clients and beneficiaries across Northern Ireland

Members were keen to explore opportunities for support for UKSPF projects/key activities and any measures that members/wider stakeholders can take to help ensure that funding decisions are made well before March 2025.

5. AOB

Members asked for an update on the recent SOLACE letter regarding future plans for Communities & Places funding. Officials informed members that the department is awaiting clarity on the Northern Ireland budget and would update the Group and SOLACE in due course.

Date of next meeting

It was agreed to plan the next meeting for March 2024.