

Tilbury Community Led Local Development Final Evaluation Report



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1. Project Context

1.1. Executive Summary

This report provided an independent evaluation for the end of term Tilbury Community Led Local Development programme (CLLD). It arose from the commitment in the SELEP ESIF 2014-2020 programme strategy to allocate ESIF funds for CLLD programmes in support of social inclusion goals.

The Tilbury CLLD programme is focussed on residents and businesses in two Thurrock wards: Tilbury St Chads and Tilbury Riverside & Thurrock Park. The programme start date was October 2018 and the programme ran until March 2023 for delivery purposes (June 2023 for financial closure).

Thurrock Council is the accountable body for the programme, which is managed by the Economic Development team.

1.2. Aims and Objectives of the Assessment

The evaluation methods and this report were designed in accordance with the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) guidance on conducting end point assessments, alongside client requirements for specific insights in order to support ongoing local delivery.

The key objectives of the evaluation will be to understand:

- The continued relevance and consistency of the project
- The progress of the project against contractual targets
- The experience of delivering and managing the project
- The economic and social impact attributable to the project
- The cost-effectiveness of the project and its value for money

Additional objectives of the evaluation will include:

- Programme management and the role and effectiveness of the Local Action Group (LAG)
- Surveys of LAG members to understand the impact and future opportunities
- The impact of Covid-19, lockdowns and other challenges

1.3. Methodology

The evaluators sought to deploy a mixed methods approach to provide a means of collecting qualitative and quantitative data via an overarching data collecting framework that mapped out the project's outcomes. An inception meeting was held to confirm the approach, agree principal milestones and discuss the development of the project-providing insights into its context and original rationale.

A desk review of the area of Tilbury and of Tilbury St Chads, Tilbury Riverside and Thurrock Park, and the strategic context was undertaken. Evaluators were mindful that this review must include ESF (Department of Work and Pensions), ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) and an overview of the Local Action Group (LAG). A qualitative component explored staff and partner experiences of delivering and managing the projects, and an exploration of project beneficiaries with those who utilised the funded services. Quantitative data was explored by means of confirmed project outputs and outcomes, and additional research was undertaken through case studies, and direct questionnaire engagement with project beneficiaries, managers and members of the Local Action Group (LAG). The assessment has endeavoured to highlight what might have happened in the absence of the intervention in a qualitative sense, and to grant a wider understanding and assessment of the delivery approach of the project, particularly during challenging delivery periods, with direct comparison to similar community led action projects and has included recommendations for future delivery and options.

Further research was undertaken through the Value For Money Guide created by People in Need, the UK Social Value UK scoring matrix and Community Trust B to measure project and social impact.

This summative assessment has been conducted and concluded to ensure compliance with funding requirements.

1.4. Headline Findings

The ESIF CLLD Programme

The Community Led Local Development (CLLD) programme, a new approach by the EU that offers highly targeted action within areas of high deprivation, had mixed success in Tilbury. The key findings are:

- Providing funding for a CLLD strategy was positive and identified local need. It remains a valid document seven years after publication.
- The requirement for a community led local action group (LAG) built trust and increased collaboration between local groups. In Tilbury this is valued and will continue to be developed and operate across new regeneration programmes.
- Despite direct community engagement being identified as a key role for CLLDs only a few local community groups engaged in delivery of the ESF programme. This was due to issues of match funding, the difficulty of managing ESIF documentation requirements and meeting the outputs and outcomes required.
- The direct match requirement of this programme, in contrast to most ESF DWP matched activity, also limited the interest of larger scale, ESF experienced providers. This was exacerbated by the very small delivery area with a high 'deprivation' requirement. In essence some providers felt they would be unable to balance 'closer to work' with 'hard to reach' participants in order to meet outputs and outcomes.
- Despite being operated as one programme, there was very little direct synergy between the business support and participant support, other than place of delivery. The exception to this was the LAG where ERDF and ESF programmes were jointly supported.
- The CLLD programme was split between DWP (ESF) and DLUHC (ERDF) oversight teams and required the Thurrock Council delivery team to deal with two separate managing authorities. This increased the complexity of the administrative work and time required to undertake reporting, claims and reviews.
- The CLLD programme was a minor element of the DWP provision and there appeared to be little attempt to embed it in the wider DWP offer, unlike the existing large scale, longer term direct funded ESF programmes. This exacerbated local competition for participants rather than providing an additional opportunity to engage with those furthest from work.

General comments:

- The programme scored well on Value for Money equity due to the wide-ranging eligibility and accessibility for interested beneficiaries.
- The programme scored well in Social Impact community benefits due to a clear alignment to the local and national goals. It was also highlighted that the LAG representation provides a good cross-section of individuals, partners and businesses from the local area.
- The ERDF Business Support Programme reached many SME owned high street businesses (23 grants), delivering improved presentation of premises and supporting the regeneration of the local area. Grants also supported local company/sole trader growth (44 grants). New jobs and

new business targets were met, with total companies receiving grants just below the output goal (68).

- The ESF programme did not achieve the revised targets. Working with those in the most deprived areas required multiple engagement routes, long term building of personal trust and multi-agency support. The programme particularly struggled to engage and then support those who were inactive, and/or those over 50 years of age. Impacted by people needing to get jobs urgently, due to the cost of living crisis, fewer people wanted to embark on further training. Tilbury CLLD was successful in working with people from diverse ethnic backgrounds and those with disability.
- The feedback from the Programme Team, LAG members and ESF delivery partners was that participants and businesses who did engage with the ESIF support, had seen notable benefits of doing so.
- Communicating and engaging with businesses and participants to promote the ESIF offer was difficult and required an intensive multi-media approach, including staff visits to high street businesses. For hard-to-reach local participants it was clear that online approaches (email, text, WhatsApp and telephone calls) had very limited success. Being present at local events, being embedded in schools, offering drop in meetings at local hubs, word of mouth recommendation by local groups and door knocking had a much greater impact. Participants responded much more strongly to personal interactions.

1.5. The Context for the Review

What was the economic and policy context at the time that the project was designed?

Tilbury is a town in the Thurrock borough of Essex. Located on the River Thames, Tilbury is a major port and industrial centre. It has a population of around 12,450, making it the third-largest town in the borough. Tilbury has a long history, with evidence of settlement in the area dating back to the Roman era.

The town has had a number of notable employers throughout its existence, including a Royal Navy dockyard and coal mining operations. These industries have, however, declined in recent years, leading to economic hardship in Tilbury. The socio-economic situation in Tilbury is reflective of the wider national picture.

In terms of employment, the majority of people in Tilbury are employed in service-based occupations, such as in retail and hospitality. The area has seen growth in employment with Tilbury leading on employment opportunities within the area¹. The median gross weekly pay for those in employment in Tilbury is £486 which is lower than the national average. This reflects the prevalence of lower-paid service-sector jobs in the town. In addition, many of the people of Tilbury are paid below the national minimum wage. The average household income in Tilbury is £18,844 which is much lower than the national average of £25,914.

¹ [Business Register and Employment Survey](#)

In terms of housing, the majority of people in Tilbury live in rented accommodation. The high cost of living in Tilbury is a major factor in the town's economic struggles. Tilbury also has a higher rate of poverty than the national average. According to the 2011 census, the percentage of people in Tilbury living in poverty is 21.3%, which is higher than the national average of 16.8%. The town has had a long history of industry and employment, but these have declined in recent years, leading to economic hardship in the town with further impacts seen by the Covid-19 Pandemic.

The high cost of living, low wages and high levels of poverty in the area are major contributing factors to this hardship.

Many residents in the area are unable to access the healthcare they need due to poverty and other barriers. This includes access to mental health services, general practitioners, and specialist care. Many people in the area don't have the financial means to pay for private health care, and there can be long waiting times to access NHS services. Additionally, there are limited health care services in the area, which can lead to inadequate care.



Finally, the lack of transport links to and from Tilbury can be a major issue for those seeking employment. Many other areas in the UK have better transport links than Tilbury, making it difficult for those living in the area to access employment opportunities in other locations.

Tilbury Community Led Local Development (TCLLD) is a Community-led Local Development (CLLD) project. The project is designed to bring together local stakeholders to work with the local community in order to create a more inclusive and prosperous local economy. The project aims to create and support new business and job opportunities, increase access to services and improve the quality of life in the area. The project is funded by the European Regional Development Fund and delivered by Thurrock Council, in partnership with local stakeholders.

The full CLLD strategy sought to build upon the 'Vision for Tilbury' developed and approved in 2013. Taking the 'Vision for Tilbury', data was utilised to build a profile of the local economy, the labour force, and the physical, social and economic context within which implementation would take place. The data was utilised to inform a SWOT analysis. The findings, together with priorities for local intervention were tested through consultation with the local community and the Local Action Group. Due to high levels of consultations that had taken place previously, the Local Action Group decided the best

approach to engaging local residents would be through a 'peer-to-peer' survey undertaken by local voluntary sector organisations to engage Tilbury residents.²

1.6. Proposed Project Summary and Delivery

The Tilbury Local Action Group (T-LAG/LAG) was a community-led group that works to improve the social, economic, and environmental well-being of the Tilbury area. The group was established in 2016 and has since been working to bring together local residents, businesses, and organisations to identify and address local issues and concerns. The LAG oversaw the Tilbury CLLD programme and was part of a broader network of LAGs established across the UK to support local development and promote sustainable economic growth.

One of the key objectives of the Tilbury LAG was to support the economic development of the area by promoting entrepreneurship and innovation. The group worked closely with local businesses to identify opportunities for growth and to support the development of new enterprises.

One of the key strengths of the Tilbury LAG was its ability to bring together a wide range of stakeholders to work towards common goals. The group works closely with local authorities, community organisations, and businesses to identify and address local needs and to promote sustainable development. This approach has helped to build strong partnerships and networks across the area.

The LAG selected Thurrock Borough Council to operate as the Accountable Body for the programme and following the SWOT analysis aimed to understand the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that required attention, including engagement with the local community. This produced the strategy objectives and action plan covering five key areas, however (4) was not part of the funded component of the programme.

- 1) Support local people to access local jobs and develop their skills
- 2) Tackle the barriers facing people furthest from the labour market
- 3) Stimulate local businesses, SMEs, micro-enterprises and social enterprises
- 4) Improve local infrastructure for residents and businesses
- 5) Encourage local civic action, pride and volunteering as routes to work

The LAG was developed initially with key partners, these were:

- Tilbury Hub Working Group
- One Community Development Trust
- Tilbury Community Forum
- And Tilbury Riverside Project

² Tilbury Community Led Local Development Strategy

A number of council services were expected to play a role in the development and delivery of the programme. Links to the private sector and broader public sector were made via the Economic Development and Skills Partnership. These included:

- Port of Tilbury
- HDS (a recruitment agency based within the port)
- Agency East
- The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP)
- Jobcentre Plus
- South Essex College
- Thurrock Adult Community College
- The Gateway Academy
- The Princes Trust

The initial programme outputs proposed over the life of the CLLD programme in Tilbury include 1,197 registrations, with over half of them moving into education or training on leaving. In addition the programme will provide support to 68 local businesses.

The overall aim of the programme strategy is to improve social and economic community cohesion in the area through the following key objectives:

- Help residents to access jobs or education/learning – this is the ESF element of the programme which was awarded an allocation of £3,550,000 (£1,775,000 ESF)
- Help local businesses and start-ups to grow and provide new job opportunities– this is the ERDF element of the programme with a total allocation of £246,000 (£123,000 ERDF). It has two elements:
 - Business frontage improvement grants
 - Grants to businesses

The LAG had been tasked to oversee the Tilbury CLLD programmes, ensuring that the required outputs were delivered, and that it met the requirements and expectations of the local community, the managing authorities and the European Commission. The LAG was expected to receive programme staff recommendations and updates on project applications and were responsible for making decisions, undertaking project calls, selection and appraisal, and made funding recommendations to the accountable body ensuring that projects contribute to the CLLD strategy, align with ESF and ERDF priorities and represent good value for money.

At the outset the projects initially were intended to cover:

Tilbury Business Support Programme (ERDF)

- Business Frontage Improvement Grants
- Grants to established business less than 3 years old

These projects have continued delivery, however there was a reduction of C5 outputs (new enterprises supported) from 40 to 20 in a PCR, and all grants moved to revenue only.

Business Frontage Improvement Grants

These grants were available to SMEs to improve business frontage, with restriction on area (businesses had to be based on Calcutta Road, St Chads Road, Montreal Road, Civic Square or on Dock Road) with a wide variety of appearance and marketing enhancements funded, these included marketing and advertising (such as window displays), new glass frontages (when linked to improved appearance or energy efficiency), display lighting (when linked to low carbon/energy efficiency), brick cleaning, cleaning and improvement of existing shutters, external painting and products for display or demonstration (not sellable goods).

Business Start Up Grants

These grants were available to SMEs if based within Tilbury St Chads or Tilbury Riverside & Thurrock Park wards. Funding would support the purchase of equipment such as IT hardware, phone systems and mobile phones, branded uniforms, materials and equipment, signage, IT software, and efficiency improvements.

ERDF eligibility was clear to businesses throughout the process, and a clear step by step process was provided. There is a clear focus on the need for job creation, with job creating projects achieving higher scores at appraisal. 95% grants were available for shop frontage improvements with 50% provided from ERDF plus 45% from Tilbury Towns Fund. From January 2023 the reduction of intervention was reduced from 95% grant contribution to 50%.

95% grants were available for shop frontage improvements **once a Tilbury Towns Fund contribution of 45% was secured, to add to the 50% from ERDF (21 of the 24 shop front grants were funded at this 95% rate).**

Tilbury Support for Unemployed and Economically Inactive

- Inspiring Tilbury
- Active Tilbury
- Route to Logistics
- Creative Tilbury
- Well Homes - Ex-Offenders
- Learning for Wellbeing

- Tilbury Opportunities (TOPPS)
- Supporting Local Skills (SEC)

Of these projects, from October 2022 only four moved forward (green) with others (red), having claimed no funding or outputs were withdrawn. This was cited due to a number of reasons including Covid-19 and issues with participation. The LAG approved a total of eight projects over the life of the programme:

Inspiring Tilbury

The programme was aimed at supporting residents of Tilbury with a wide range of career advice, regardless of situation. Support was provided in-person or remotely, and supported pathways into employment, whether through training, education, and job searching support. The comprehensive support included:

- Careers information and advice for all ages
- Create a careers action plan
- Psychometric testing to discover which careers are suitable for you
- Mentoring
- Employability training
- Help you understand which industries offer more opportunities in the local area
- Job search training
- Creating or updating your CV
- Job application training and interview skills
- Youth engagement projects

Residents were able to access support by visiting colleagues within local hubs, emailing or calling.

Active Tilbury

This project was run by the Recreation and Leisure team at the Council. Their advisors helped participants improve their health and wellbeing whilst looking for employment opportunities. This included running activities such as boxercise, circuit training, and yoga, as well as team sports such as cricket and football that helped participants engage with the community.

Creative Tilbury

This project was run by Creative Blast. They helped participants to overcome anxiety and improve their confidence by developing their creative skills which could then be transferred into many other jobs and careers. They also helped participants to create their CV, improve their interview skills, find volunteering and employment opportunities, and learn more about the creative sector. Claims and outputs were claimed for this project. It was found that whilst interest was high in the project, interest came from outside of the Tilbury area and were not eligible.

Well-Homes - Ex-Offenders

The Well-Homes project linked well with Inspiring Tilbury by providing employment support. The support for ex-offenders also provided drug and alcohol support if required. Individuals were referred to the programme via the Probation Service, or the homelessness service. Additional support included:

- Short term housing in Tilbury
- Settled accommodation, once it has been shown that a tenancy could be maintained
- One to one support to access employment, education, training or volunteering
- Advice on benefits, income maximisation and energy saving
- Access to physical fitness programmes
- Access to mental health and well-being programmes
- Access to local alcohol and drug intervention services

Learning for Wellbeing

Delivered in partnership with Thurrock Adult Community College, Inclusion Recovery College Thurrock and Thurrock Council's Public Health Team the project aimed to deliver wellbeing and support activities for local residents. Individual mentoring sessions and small group wellbeing activities were provided with support offered to those who required confidence support. Activities included:

- Confidence building and self-esteem
- Yoga
- Eat well to be well
- Money Management
- First Aid for Adults
- Paediatric first aid
- The Healthy Mind Gardening and wider opportunities to take part in enrichment and outdoor activities

Tilbury Opportunities (TOPPS)

The project provided support for Tilbury residents seeking paid employment. Project partners included Thurrock Lifestyle Solutions, Thurrock Adult Community College, One Community Development Trust and Thurrock Centre for Independent Living. The project provided:



- English sessions for speakers of other languages
- 121 Mentoring Support
- Support with coming barriers to employment
- Confidence and motivation training sessions
- Volunteer training opportunities
- Accredited employability courses
- Job search assistance

Delivery partners for each individual project are highlighted below:

- A. **Inspiring Tilbury** – Thurrock Council
- B. **Active Tilbury** – Lead Partner: Thurrock Council, supporting Partner: The Martial Academy
- C. **Creative Employment** – Creative Blast
- D. **Well-Homes - Ex-Offenders** – Thurrock Council
- E. **Learning for Wellbeing** – Thurrock Adult Community College (TACC), Thurrock Council
- F. **TOPPS** – Lead Partners: Thurrock Lifestyle Solutions CIC, Supporting Partners: One Community Trust, Thurrock Adult Community College, Thurrock Centre for Independent Living
- G. **Supporting Local Skills**- South Essex College
- H. **Routes to Logistics** – Port of Tilbury (withdrawn)

2. Project Progress

2.1. Proposed Outputs - ESF

The project outputs and outcomes are defined as per the ESF and ERDF definitions and were agreed with the partners depending on their ability to deliver. The project outputs and outcomes assured that the project was strongly aligned with national and local strategic requirements, particularly to support those people who were furthest from the labour market and to support the upgrade and development of businesses.

ESF Outputs:

CO01 - Unemployed, including long-term unemployed

- Unemployed are persons without work, available for work and actively seeking work.
- Participants who start and leave an ESF operation co-financed by the Department for Work and Pensions opt-in organisation or an operation funded under the devolved element of the WHP should be counted under the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) definition of 'unemployed' where this is applicable (see below). DWP defines unemployed as:
 - "Persons out of work, available for work and actively seeking work who are registered as a Job Seeker Allowance (JSA) claimant or Universal Credit

(UC) claimant whose circumstances place them in the All Work Related Requirements (AWRR) – Intensive Work Search Regime. This includes persons who are registered as unemployed but have a small part-time job;

- For JSA participants a small part-time job equates to employment under 16 hours per week; and
- For UC claimants, a small part-time job equates to employment that does not move the claimant out of the All Work Related Requirements (AWRR) – Intensive Work Search Regime.

CO03 - Inactive

- "Inactive" are persons currently not part of the labour force (in the sense that they are not employed or unemployed according to the definitions provided).
- Participants who start and leave either an ESF operation co-financed by the Department for Work and Pensions opt-in organisation or an operation funded under the devolved element of the WHP should be counted under the national Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) definition of 'inactive' where this applies (see below). The Department for Work and Pensions consider persons who fall into the following groups as being 'inactive':
 - Full time students (even if registered unemployed);
 - Employment Support Allowance (ESA), Incapacity Benefit (IB) and Income;
 - Support (IS) claimants
 - Universal Credit claimants who are placed in: the Work V2 Published October 2018 29 Preparation Requirement or Work Focused Interview Requirement conditionality groups;
 - People not in receipt of benefits; and
 - People who are distant from the labour market that need additional support, skills and/or confidence to enable them to move towards employment.

CO16 - Participants with disabilities

- "Participants with disabilities" are persons who are registered disabled according to national definitions.

ESF Outcomes:

R1 - Unemployed participants into employment

- This programme-specific immediate result indicator is a subset of the 'common immediate result' indicator "Participants in employment, including self-employment, upon leaving". It is a subset because it only counts the participants who were 'unemployed' when they started at the operation.

R2 - Inactive participants into employment or job search upon leaving

- This programme-specific indicator combines the 'common' immediate result indicator "Inactive participants engaged in job search upon leaving" (ESF CR01) with any inactive participants counted under "the common immediate result

indicator “Participants in employment, including self-employment upon leaving” (ESF CR04).

CR02 - Participants in education/training upon leaving

- Inactive persons who have received ESF support and who are newly engaged in job searching activities upon leaving the ESF operation. "Inactive" is defined as in the indicator "Inactive". "Engaged in job searching" is to be understood as persons usually without work, available for work and actively seeking work as defined in the indicator "Unemployed". “Upon leaving” is to be understood as up to 4 weeks after the exit date of the participant.

Due to the time elapsing between initial bid writing in 2015 and this evaluation in 2023 the originator of the first application was no longer working at Thurrock Council. This meant that the evaluators were unable to validate the initial logic used for ESF output and outcome selection. Whilst it would seem that these targets, in hindsight, were difficult for the project to achieve, they were based on the strategy and expectations of growth in 2016.

2.2. Progress Against Outputs and Finances - ESF

At point of the mid-term evaluation, the outputs had each achieved less than 10% of their respective total profiles. However, based on the budgets approved for projects, around 28% of the funding had been spent. This demonstrates a disconnect between the funding being spent and the delivery of outputs, which is a theme that has continued in the second half of this programme.

As of Q4 2022, there was a significant underperformance against each of the outputs and outcomes, with the best performing outcome being the R1 (unemployed participants into employment) at 52% achieved against the total profile. It must be noted that the delivery of the CR02 output was significantly impacted by the withdrawal of the South Essex College project. The total ESF expenditure had achieved 31% against profile.

70% of participants are from the 20% most deprived Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in the Tilbury area, meeting the targeting requirements of the programme.

Performance to Date - Q4 2022

Indicator	Targets		Performance at Time of Evaluation		Projected Performance at Project Closure		Overall Assessment
	Original	Adjusted	No.	% of Target	No.	% of Target	
ESF Expenditure	£3,550,000	£1,960,618	£1,130,002	31.83%	£1,230,919	62.78%	
CO01: Unemployed, including long-term unemployed	790	450	179	39.78%	201	44.67%	
CO03: Inactive	450	208	78	37.50%	88	42.31%	
CO16: Participants with disabilities	156	66	45	68.18%	50	75.76%	
R1: Unemployed participants into employment	147	154	62	40.26%	69	44.81%	
R2: Inactive participants into employment or job search upon leaving	118	65	10	15.38%	15	53.85%	
CR02: Participants in education/training upon leaving	487	140	41	29.29%	50	35.71%	

To address the wider underperformance and the risk of funding clawback, a second PCR was submitted in Q3 2022. This was rejected by DWP in January 2023 and appealed. The appeal was ongoing at point of evaluation before Thurrock Council was notified that it had been rejected in March 2023. It must be noted that between the submission of the PCR and the rejection of the appeal, a period of 6 months had elapsed.

Further committed expenditure will be claimed and defrayed in Q1 2023 from the projects delivering, taking the forecasted total expenditure to £1,230,919. This would mean 62% of ESF profile would have been achieved.

However it is worth noting that the profiled outputs and outcomes are for a programme of £1.96m. As the project will not achieve 38% of the expenditure, it is expected for outputs and outcomes to be commensurately reduced by DWP when assessing performance, even though the PCR and appeal has been turned down. The evaluators were therefore asked to also measure performance based on this figure. These have been included in the table below:

Indicator	Targets		Projected performance at project closure		Overall Assessment
	Adjusted (PCR)	Adjusted (62.8%)	No.		
ESF Expenditure	£1,960,618	£1,230,919	£1,230,919	100%	
CO01: Unemployed, including long-term unemployed	450	283	201	71.13%	
CO03: Inactive	208	131	88	67.37%	
CO16: Participants with disabilities	66	41	50	120.63%	
R1: Unemployed participants into employment	154	97	69	71.35%	
R2: Inactive participants into employment or job search upon leaving	65	41	35	85.74%	
CR02: Participants in education/training upon leaving	140	88	50	56.87%	

A recommendation was made in the mid-term evaluation to support the project performance monitoring and improve the delivery partners' understanding of the importance of output creation from the funding allocation. This was actioned and the delivery partners had continued support from the Programme Team in the form of ongoing meetings over the remainder of the project.

2.3. Proposed Outputs - ERDF

The outputs proposed within the initial bid were:

(C1) Number of enterprises receiving support

For financial support (loan or grant) investment:

- Grant or Loan/Risk Finance Investment of at least £1,000.

(C5) Number of new enterprises supported

A new business is one which:

- Has been registered at Companies House or HMRC for less than 12 months before assistance is provided; or
- Is a business locating in the England programme area for the first time, to start trading (i.e. registers for VAT, or registers for National Insurance (Class 2))

contributions, or the start date of a company's first accounting period, or the date a business receives risk finance investment prior to its first commercial sale).

(C8) Employment increase in supported enterprises

- A new, permanent, paid, full-time equivalent (FTE) job created as a result of activity supported by the project.

It is worth noting at this stage that reductions were made to C5 outputs during a PCR. This reflected the local and wider national situation, particularly that of businesses being closed during Covid-19 lockdowns. Businesses were therefore focused on recovery rather than growth and there was a perceived higher risk to start a business, thus having a negative impact on recruitment for this project.

2.4. Progress Against Outputs and Finances - ERDF

At point of the mid-term evaluation, the number of ERDF outputs achieved were below profile which was predominantly due to Covid-19, however the Programme Manager was confident that the primary output of the number of enterprises receiving support was achievable by the end of the project. The number of new enterprises supported was reduced in an initial Project Change Request (PCR) in Q1 2022 from 40 to 20, due to the prioritisation of delivering the primary output whilst managing the limited resources within the Programme Team.

Performance to Date - Q1 2023

Indicator	Targets		Performance at Time of Evaluation		Projected Performance at Project Closure		Overall Assessment
	Original	Adjusted	No.	% of Target	No.	% of Target	
ERDF Expenditure	£852,198		£593,514	69.65%	£663,514	77.86%	
C1: Number of Enterprises Receiving Support	68	68	53	77.94%	60	88.24%	
C5: Number of New Enterprises Supported	40	20	19	95.00%	20	100.00%	
C8: Employment Increase in Supported Enterprises	8	6	6	100.00%	6	100.00%	

Based on the Q1 2023 data of outputs due to be claimed, 53 enterprises had received support achieving 77% of the target. There are a further 7 enterprises who received and

defrayed grant funding in Q1 2023 and will be claimed as outputs, meaning that at point of evaluation, 88% of the profile is committed to have been achieved.

Further grant funding had been awarded, taking the total of grants awarded to 68 which would have been 100% of profile, however a small percentage of these grants are anticipated to not be claimed and defrayed due to natural drop-out.

Both the number of new enterprises supported (C5) and employment increase in supported enterprises (C8) have already successfully achieved over 95% against profile, with the latter having successfully achieved 100% and the C5 forecasted to also achieve this.

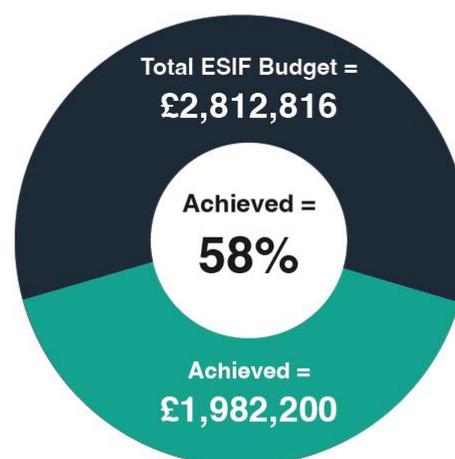
At point of evaluation, the ERDF expenditure had achieved 69% against the profile based on the Q1 2023 cumulative expenditure and with the further awarded grants anticipated to spend and claim before the project end date, the ERDF financial expenditure will also increase proportionally.

The original application included a total grants budget of £246,000. Due to the higher than anticipated average grant value and the Management costs being significantly less than anticipated (largely in part due to the non-recruitment of a Compliance Officer), £169,258 was reprofiled in a PCR from the Management to the Grant budget.

In summary, at point of evaluation the total ESIF programme had achieved 58% of the total expenditure profile as approved in the initial PCR.

Based on the remaining committed ESF expenditure due to be claimed, the project will achieve at least 67% against its total ESIF profile, with further forecasted expenditure against the ERDF grants also committed.

ESIF Expenditure Achieved in Q4 2022 Against Total Profile



3. Project Delivery and Management

3.1. Appropriateness of Initial Design

The CLLD strategy was developed through extensive community engagement, utilising evidence gathered from developing the adopted 'Vision for Tilbury' and by re-evaluating the SWOT analysis to reflect the ESIF objectives, ensuring that proposed expenditure would be proportional to the population and its greatest needs.

The CLLD strategy and the socioeconomic research underpinning it gave a realistic view of the needs of the area and consequently the design of the ESIF programme deliberately focused activity where the need was greatest and most concentrated.

This resulted in the following five objectives being identified as the highest priorities:

- Action A: Support local people to access local jobs and develop their skills
- Action B: Tackle the barriers facing people furthest from the labour market
- Action C: Stimulate local businesses, SMEs, micro-enterprises and social enterprises
- Action D: Improve local infrastructure for residents and businesses
- Action E: Encourage local civic action, pride and volunteering as routes into work

It must be noted that objective 'D - Improve local infrastructure for residents and businesses' was not taken forward, being deemed ineligible for support. This was a missed opportunity given that one of the barriers to accessing support identified was the lack of key travel infrastructure.

With regards to the ERDF element of the programme and strategic objective 'C - Stimulate local businesses' there were 28 outputs (i.e grants claimed and defrayed) achieved in 2022 in comparison to 12 in 2021. There is a clear build in momentum which coincides with the lifting of Covid restrictions and the return to 'business as usual'. Additionally, in discussion with the Programme Team and as noted at the mid-term evaluation, it was clear that there was distrust in the grant offer for the improvement of the shop frontages as there was a perception that it was 'too good to be true'. As more businesses accessed the funding, the stronger the evidence base was, with case studies and word of mouth testimonials supporting the build in project momentum.

Therefore the inclusion of grants to improve shop frontages and to benefit smaller businesses that had been trading for less than three years was an effective use of funding, as evidenced by the delivery of 70% of the primary output and the potential for further delivery, had the project not had a delay in momentum due to Covid.



In terms of the ESF element of the programme there is significant underperformance against the outputs.

Each of the remaining four projects delivering are aligned to the strategic objectives and there is no strategic objective that is not being delivered against.

Covid was a contributing factor to the underperformance as residents were unable to physically access services due to lockdown restrictions and as a result of the challenges Covid presented, the DWP launched its own support offer through Kickstart and Restart.

This offer had the same target audience as that of the Tilbury ESF projects and thus the market became more saturated and the audience harder to reach. Additionally, the resourcing challenges faced by the Programme Team will have impacted their ability to manage and market the programme in the same way that a fully resourced Programme Team could have.

However, they are not the sole reasons for underperformance: whilst the objectives defined were relevant to the needs of the community, this did not translate to the delivery of outputs. Additionally there has been limited match funding available with mainstream welfare to work providers confirming that providing match was the reason they had no interest in applying to be an ESF delivery partner, suggesting the initial scale was too ambitious.

3.2. Management of the Project

Recruitment and resource has had a negative impact on the management of the programme. In the initial strategy, the proposed Programme Team consisted of the Programme Manager and three Project Officers. Each had clearly defined roles and it is clear that the programme did not have the level of resource anticipated, compounding the pressure on the Programme Team. An external consultancy firm was procured through the project to manage the initial phase of the programme and the current Programme Manager was then recruited into post 9 months after the programme commenced. To support the Programme Manager, a Senior Economic Development Officer was recruited in January 2022, with a view to working a minimum of 0.6FTE on Tilbury CLLD. However from September 2021, the Programme Manager ceased to formally be FT, so in practice there has been 1.1-1.2 FTE working on the programme since January 2022.

In addition to this, the external consultancy firm was also contracted as an ESF grant assessor and latterly, a general economic development contract independent to project funding was utilised to procure additional support for project delivery.



Therefore despite this, at no point throughout the programme lifespan has the Programme Team been representative of the proposed one.

Thurrock Council had responsibility for processing quarterly claims, checking and approving communications, addressing any queries on ESIF processes or protocols, ERDF grant administration and facilitating the LAG meetings and reporting. Additionally the Programme Manager spent time facilitating collaboration between ESF delivery partners, hosting a delivery partner meeting every two months to provide the opportunity

to collaborate and cross-refer. Following the recommendation made in the mid-term evaluation, this moved to a monthly occurrence and was led by the Senior EDO.

The ESF grant recipients were focused on delivery, with responsibility for recruitment and managing their own expenditure and outputs against their individual targets. In discussion with the Programme Team it was made clear to the evaluators that not all of the ESF delivery partners necessarily had the capacity or experience to manage the level of auditable paperwork that ESIF funding requires, which resulted in a steep learning curve and contributed to an initial delay with submitting acceptable claims affecting progress and quarterly profiles.

However it is important to note that assistance was provided to applicants at their point of bid, under the ESF grant evaluation contract which offered feedback on drafts. At this point it was stressed to applicants that the programme administration would be resource intensive and every project was funded on the basis that it could recruit, support and progress participants in line with evidencing requirements.

At the point of the mid-term evaluation, it was noted that the Council had not taken a strongly proactive role in directing ESF project delivery and examples were provided with recommendations for action. This included the Programme Team to support the delivery partners to develop individual match monitoring sheets to ensure awareness of their funding profiles and how they tied to their outputs. This was actioned and significant improvement in the monitoring and claim submission has been seen over the second half of the programme.

Marketing was a major focus and key recommendation of the mid-term evaluation. Detailed suggestions for the development of a communication plan for both the ERDF and ESF projects was suggested. In discussion with the Programme Team, it is clear this recommendation was actioned and the communications strategy was successfully implemented by the apprentice. It must be noted that the Programme Manager's personal approach to engaging with ERDF grant recipients was considered to be a factor in increase in trust from the business community and subsequent increase in outputs.

In terms of wider engagement, there was regular contact with other CLLDs, specifically Hastings and Folkestone as the two other SELEP projects within the area to share concerns and best practice. Due to concerns specifically on the management of the ESF programme, the Programme Team also attended meetings with national CLLDs in order to address this.

Despite the limited resource, the Programme Team were active in their efforts to promote the support and to engage the community. It can be noted from the mid-term evaluation and from discussion with LAG members that the Programme Manager is highly regarded.

3.3. The Role and Effectiveness of the LAG

Prior to the development of the support offered through the CLLD programme, previous interventions in the area had low impact on the local community, which was an outcome perceived to be due, in part, to poor collaboration between the local agencies and the community. This resulted in disengagement from the community and lower levels of trust in local agencies. Therefore the development of the LAG was a key priority to ensure it was an effective tool to engage the community and support the project functions.

The LAG structure was well scoped in the initial strategy and the Terms of Reference are robust. A comprehensive assessment of the LAG's activity against the CLLD ESIF guidelines was conducted in the mid-term evaluation and it can be said that the LAG met the statutory requirements in line with the 7 key areas.

As part of this evaluation, the Evaluation Team attended a LAG meeting and conducted a survey of LAG members. A detailed agenda and progress reports were sent ahead of the meeting. Unfortunately not enough LAG members attended the meeting and they therefore did not have the required number on the grant panel to assess the current ERDF applications. This could result in a delay on processing grants, although it must be noted this was the poorest attendance they had received to date and not standard practice. In discussion with the Programme Team, it was noted that a strength of the LAG was their flexibility and speed to assess grant applications at short notice.

As evidenced through LAG reports, the mid-term evaluation and in conversation with LAG members, there is a strong focus on collaboration, partnership working and community engagement. The LAG does not provide the same support as a programme steering board would and therefore has less involvement with the strategic objectives and ongoing programme management. The lack of a programme steering board also compounds the pressure on the Programme Manager. A benefit of the LAG was that some members also delivered the ESF projects and were able to provide constructive feedback on delivery.

In terms of wider partnerships, the other support offers available at the point of strategy development were well scoped and considered. A commitment to delivering an extensive package of support to local people to access local jobs was already in place and the ESIF proposal was designed with this in mind, looking to address the gaps in the provision and build on the work already undertaken to engage the community. As a result, links to the private and broader public sector were made via the Economic Development and Skills Partnership.

However it must be noted that in discussion with the Programme Team, the business support infrastructure in Tilbury isn't the strongest and the Growth Hub does not provide the same level of support as seen in other LEP areas. This is noted as primarily a resource and funding issue.

The main concern noted in discussion with the Programme Team and ESF delivery partners was that the DWP were not as engaged with projects or supporting brokerage

as anticipated. This was particularly relevant when DWP's Restart project launched and effectively increased the 'competition' for Tilbury residents. Whilst relationships were built with DWP and a representative was invited to attend (and did) a number of LAG meetings, referrals for potential participants remained extremely low.

3.4. The Impact of Covid-19

Covid-19 had an adverse impact upon the delivery of ESIF programmes nationally and there is clear evidence that the disruption impacted the momentum of delivery for both the ERDF and ESF elements of the Tilbury CLLD programme.

Directives made by Central Government had a specific impact, including the suspension of fortnightly attendance to sign on at the DWP/Jobcentre Plus during lockdown, thus reducing signposting opportunities to potential referrals. Other organisations that would normally offer outreach functions were also forced to close local venues and programmes.

Additionally, offender releases were also delayed, specifically impacting the Housing Ex-Offender project being delivered by Thurrock Council.

It must also be noted that during lockdown, elements of project resources were redeployed to Covid-specific emergency support.

It is evident in the timeline of delivered ERDF outputs that there was a delay in momentum which began to build once businesses moved into a post-Covid world and returned to 'business as usual'. In discussion with the Programme Team and LAG members, it was clear that during Covid there was a lot of business uncertainty and a reluctance or inability to manage cash flow to enable the upfront spending and retrospective grant claim that ERDF funding requires.

In terms of delivery of the ESF outputs, it is clear from discussions with the Programme Team and delivery partners that the reduction in ability to engage with participants, particularly on a face-to-face basis, had an adverse impact. Face-to-face engagement was cited as a key mechanism to build trust with potential participants. This method of engagement was dramatically reduced during lockdown but also post-lockdown, due to the perceived risk and fear to travel, move off benefits or even to socially engage..

Where methods of engagement were assessed in the mid-term evaluation, it was noted that in the weeks where home visits occurred and where personal contact were undertaken, a higher number of outputs occurred. In discussion with Inspiring Tilbury, the ESF project which achieved the most outputs, a key strength they identified as an advantage was the physical presence within the community and the ability to open sooner than other organisations as they came under the umbrella of education.

As noted in the second PCR, a contributing factor towards ESF project expenditure not dramatically reducing is that only one ESF delivery partner was "able to take a short-term reduction in costs through furloughing staff. The remainder attempted to

continue delivery via alternative routes but this meant a significant impact on performance with a negligible reduction in costs across the programme.”

Of the six ESF projects undertaking CLLD delivery only two had begun delivery at the start of lockdowns. For ESF projects the impact of COVID was profound and resulted in:

- Loss of face-to-face engagement impacted the projects for almost a year. This was compounded by the late start of the CLLD approval with the first awards only be made to delivery bodies in September 2019 (and starting in early 2020). Instead of the original planned delivery period of October 2018-December 2022 most organisations had around 1.5 years of effective delivery time. This included a project extension of 6 months to March 2023.
- Online and other non face-to-face contacts, extensively tested by one project, did not offer an effective route to engagement with hard to reach target groups, who at the time were also struggling with lock downs and mental health issues. Indications are that this was across all age ranges, but we recommend further investigation.
- Increased competition from DWP COVID support offers which were linked to direct JCP/DWP referrals.
- Post-lockdown there were an increased number of people inactive in the job market and reluctant to engage.
- ERDF business grants were less impacted than the ESF programme but face to face engagement was also curtailed and many sole traders and SMEs had limited funds to invest in improvements or new equipment.

It should be noted that DWP did not make any direct financial concessions to the CLLD programmes due to COVID, other than accepting very limited outputs and outcomes during the lockdown period. Any changes to CLLD output and outcome targets required a proportionate reduction in budget.

4. Project Outcomes and Impact

4.1. Survey Results

A survey was shared with all members of the LAG to understand the strengths, weaknesses, future issues that the LAG would need to address, the management of the improvement, and how future funding opportunities should be utilised. Responses were limited, however there were clear themes of the strengths and focus that the LAG should have from each of the respondents which are detailed in the graphic.



A number of suggestions were made to suggest current focus that is required for the LAG, particularly at the end of these projects. Respondents highlighted that:

- Support should focus on the VCS sector which has strengths and benefits within the area
- Additional work could be undertaken to understand the needs and requirements of the local community and barriers to employment
- A stronger focus on outreach and engagement with the local community,
- Future focus should be aimed at ensuring that the LAG endures to support the local community
- Support should be provided to the community via skills and continued employment training.

Respondents were also asked about the barriers that the LAG will face over the next five years, whilst there is currently no agreed resource for the facilitation of the LAG once the programme ends, it is insightful to understand where direction and risks should be for the future in case future funding is achieved. It was highlighted that:

- Changes to and lacking funding may become an issue, especially when work has been undertaken to build the LAG, a stop/start approach may damage the reputation
- Sufficient appetite may not be there from the community to be involved with LAG initiatives
- That future projects are recognised within the area as LAG projects
- That future projects should support other opportunities within the area such as Free Ports for a conjoined local approach
- That there is a lack of engagement with the community leading to a lacking understanding of their needs and requirements
- That there are potential difficulties in attracting and retaining quality personnel within the local authority due to financial pressures and that the current economic and political climate is viewed as unstable, which is a demotivating factor for engagement

There were a number of suggestions for improvements that could be made for future programme delivery. These included: managing staffing levels, higher levels of engagement with businesses, and that additional work could be undertaken using higher numbers of the VCS. Further suggestions highlighted that there should be higher levels of project promotion, more face to face engagement with end beneficiaries, and more realistic targets in future bids.

“100% 100% of respondents highlighted that the project was well managed.”

Comment was also made on the issue that businesses felt that the funding and support was “too good to be true”. Respondents were asked how this issue could be addressed

if future funding is provided. The main response highlighted that additional marketing and engagement activities would increase engagement, understanding and trust within the community. A further comment highlighted that funding could be managed by a coalition of “well trusted voluntary and community sector groups rather than the local authority”. This falls in line with government expectations for future funding in terms of local organisations delivering local support to local individuals. Respondents highlighted that despite the difficulties within the programme, the programme team managed the programme well.

Respondents were asked where future focus should be if additional business funding was achieved. Responses included- support for business growth, capital funding for start-up businesses, business mentoring, and support in setting up, registering and operating small businesses.

If additional funding was available to support individuals, respondents felt that a focus should be given to providing volunteer opportunities for experience development, support and courses in entrepreneurship and long term support that covers a wide variety of topics to give individuals the best chance in achieving employment.

Further comment was made by respondents that future funding rounds would require a reduction in paperwork as this was a heavy burden when it came to project delivery, and that because the paperwork requirements were so stringent, this stopped some partners (particularly potential VCS partners) from joining in on delivery as they were unable to undertake and adhere to the strict paperwork and data requirements of the project. However this is standard paperwork from the funding bodies and so out of the control of the managing authority.

4.2. Social Impact

Assessment of social impact was undertaken utilising two methods- The Social Value UK scoring matrix for social impact, and through Community Trust B. Both organisations provide evaluation tools that highlight the impact of a particular project and suggests recommendations to further develop and record impact across projects.

Each area is given a RAG marking to confirm: **Achieved** (High Scoring) **Partially Achieved** (Middle Scoring) and **Not Achieved** (Low Scoring).

The table below provides a summary of social impact:

Measure	Total Achievable	Total Achieved
Governance of Project	10.00	8.9
Community Benefits	10.00	8.5
Service User Impact	N/A	N/A
Environmental	N/A	N/A

The project did include elements of environmental support (for example shop frontage programme that would reduce energy usage/costs), however this has not been measured. This has not been included within the scoring due to lack of available data. However, in future projects, information could be captured pre and post projects to evaluate the impact on the environment.

At the point of evaluation, evaluators were unable to speak directly to end beneficiaries which is a core element of the Service User Impact scoring.

Governance of Project - Total Achievable 10.00 *Achieved 8.9*

The reports highlight the set up and structure of the LAG which supported scoring within this area and internal processes were strong. It was detailed that within ESF funding, four calls for proposals were made which were externally assessed by procured evaluators and recommendations were made to the LAG who made a final decision. ERDF business grants were scored to a set framework, and if the scoring threshold was achieved these were presented to the LAG for approval. The LAG provides a good cross section of individuals, partners and businesses however for future development a strong focus on EDI could be brought on board and for higher scores higher engagement from LAG members could assist this, with numbers attending meetings gradually declining during the projects.

Community Benefits - Total Achievable 10.00 *Achieved 8.5*

The project showed clear alignment to local and national goals. Issues outside of the project coordinators control, we feel, had an impact on the overall benefits to the community. Therefore this has been accounted for within the scoring.

To have the largest impact and benefit on the community in the future there are ideas which could be embraced. For example: a risk register should highlight issues that have been identified within this project and mitigations be considered. To avoid a lack of engagement (across both projects) additional resources need to be utilised (for example 1:1 business visits or innovative ways to overcome a lack of motivation of beneficiaries to be engaged). Recruitment of staff was a significant issue therefore delivery was limited i.e fewer people able to do 1:1 visits. It is important to note that the development and strategy of the programme in 2016 was formally approved in October 2018. Only once this approval had been received resources could then be mobilised, which further impedes delivery, and so no delivery was able to be undertaken pre-lockdown.

5. Project Value for Money

Evaluation was undertaken as part of the VFM Guide created by People in Need. The VFM Systems Matrix can be used at any project stage, however is particularly insightful at project assessment. It requires the review of the project documents, internal procedures as well as discussions with program and support staff.

This qualitative tool presents project management teams and evaluators a method for assessing the Value for Money using the “4E” categories: Economy, Efficiency, Effectiveness and Equity. The analysis of each “E” is divided into subcategories of the different stages of a project:

- Identification and Planning
- Implementation and Monitoring
- Evaluation and Learning

Each sub-category includes several standards to be assessed. The standards and their description were adjusted to fit ERDF objectives and the delivery of the project via the organisation.

Each category is scored from 1-3 or N/A- not applicable. 1=No/Not implemented, 2=Partly/Partly Implemented, 3=implemented/fully implemented. Each area is given a RAG marking to confirm: **Achieved** (Green) **Partially Achieved** (Amber) and **Not Achieved** (Red).

The table below provides a summary of value for money:

Measure	Total Achievable	Total Achieved
Economy	3%	2.00%
Efficiency	3%	1.8%
Effectiveness	3%	1.8%
Equity	3%	2.4%

Economy - Total Achievable 3% Total Achieved 2.00%

The assessment includes a view of budget management, project management, and the planning and implementation of budgets. Due to the changes within PCRs and reductions in funding throughout the project, concerns are highlighted within the assessment about initial budget outset management and initial scoping, however it is positive to see that throughout the project, and with resource changes throughout the project, changes were made to reflect the changes within the programme. It has also highlighted that average grant value was higher than anticipated and management costs were under-anticipated, however these concerns were addressed within the PCRs.

Efficiency - Total Achievable 3% *Total Achieved 1.8%*

The project scored lower than average within this section however a number of positives should be highlighted.

- Improvements could be made within data collection and financial management of the project budgets, however the project was fully aligned with ERDF and ESF guidelines.
- Additional scoring could have been achieved through the provision of different alternatives for delivery of the programme and financial management, however the aim of the evaluation is to provide this information and future recommendations to address this.
- It is also highlighted from project staff that resources were lacking during the project, and it would be vital for future programmes to ensure that programmes are fully resourced to ensure compliance to original project plans and to achieve expected outcomes.
- The programme did engage with the voluntary sector throughout the project, however the absence of match funding precluded participation, and they were unable to be in a position to apply
- Contracts could be delivered via 'payment with results' to ensure a focus is kept on delivery and achievement.

Effectiveness - Total Achievable 3% *Total Achieved 1.8%*

The project scored lower than average within this section however a number of positives should be highlighted.

- There is a clear requirement for this type of project within the delegated areas, and this need will have increased due to the economic situation within the area, the Covid 19 Pandemic and the on-going cost of living crisis.
- It was highlighted that long-term funding is a benefit to the impact and development of this type of delivery, as often beneficiaries would require a wide scope of support prior to accessing the labour market such as support with anxiety, depression, money and debt management, all of which were addressed within these programmes.
- Unfortunately, due to a saturated market of similar projects (for example support offered by the DWP) effectiveness was reduced, aligned with the impact of lockdowns particularly on shops that were unable to open, and whose focus went from refit to survival, the project would struggle with its effectiveness, which can be seen in the final project outputs.

- It would be beneficial in future projects to define a range of delivery options to take into account fluctuating situations within the UK and a range of methods so that the project can alternate between methods if required.

A positive step was the delivery in local areas and hubs, this was highlighted by project deliverers who mentioned that regular opening times and accessible spaces ensured that individuals knew and developed an understanding of where and what was available to them.

Equity - Total Achievable 3% *Total Achieved 2.4%*

The project scored highest within this area due to the wide ranging eligibility across the projects inline with ERDF and ESF guidance. SMEs were entitled to apply and clear guidance was provided to ensure clarity for businesses looking to apply, this was also the case for individuals accessing support, however internal processes required development during the life of the projects.

- The ESF project also focussed on supporting disabled individuals to access support, however additional scoring could have been achieved through allotted budgets to support deaf and hard of hearing individuals with translation services, ethnic minorities support with translation services and offerings for the blind community with documentation and support in braille.
- Further scoring could be achieved through feedback processes and clear complaint processes for both SME and individual beneficiaries which has not been found or seen by evaluators.
- Further additional scoring could have been received by providing engagement with marginalised communities and religious groups to ensure equity and access.

6. Conclusion and Lessons Learnt

6.1. What would have happened without the support, and is it still relevant?

In 2016 when the CLLD strategy was developed, Tilbury was the poorest part of Thurrock and contained eight Local Super Output Areas (LSOAs). Of the eight LSOAs, five were in the 20% most disadvantaged in England.

There were 787 more jobs than there were employed residents and the unemployment rate in Tilbury (9.2%) was almost double that for England (4.7%).



Additionally, the number of people employed in low-skilled elementary occupations was significantly higher than the national average and it was found that people in Tilbury had fewer qualifications than the Thurrock and England averages. More than one in three people in Tilbury today did not have a single qualification.

For small businesses in the town, the need for regeneration was great due to the general disregard and disrepair of shopfronts.³

Statistically there was a strong evidence base highlighting the need for support in the areas identified in the objectives.

Whilst objective 'C - Stimulate local businesses, SMEs, micro-enterprises and social enterprises' and the take-up of the ERDF business grants has seen success, the other objectives have fallen significantly short and the achieved outputs do not reflect the strength of requirements identified within the strategy.

It must also be noted that Tilbury CLLD was designed to be a five year intervention and due to late approval and the adverse impact of Covid-19, the ESF programme has essentially had three years of disrupted delivery which has had a knock-on effect on achieving outputs.

At the point of evaluation, data was not available to engage ESF project beneficiaries so it is difficult to assess what would have happened without the support. However, as noted in the Section 7 case study on Inspiring Tilbury, a number of beneficiary case studies were shared with the evaluators, highlighting the extremely positive social impact that the support had upon the individuals in terms of developing confidence, skills and widening career opportunities.

The socioeconomic factors that were originally assessed as part of the CLLD strategy development (from which the programme objectives were derived) will have arguably been adversely affected by Covid-19, meaning that the strategic objectives remain relevant. It must also be taken into consideration that the launch of 'competing' offers of support through DWP highlights that Central Government's priorities align with that of the support offered through the ESF programme.

For future opportunities, the scale of the support offered should be considered, using this programme as a benchmark.

6.2. Making the Most of Future Opportunities Post EU-Exit

As a member state of the EU, the UK was eligible for financial support from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF), jointly referred to by the UK government as EU structural funds.

³ [Thurrock Council - Community-led-local development strategy. Tilbury local action group](#)

The November 2020 spending review described the overall purpose of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) which replaces a trial UK Community Renewal Fund (UKCRF) as 'to level up and create opportunity across the UK for people and places'. The spending review also said that UKSPF spending will ramp up to around £1.5bn a year and "at least match current receipts from EU structural funds." It will also 'operate over multiple years' to provide certainty and enable long-term planning.[4] Investments should be aligned with the government's clean growth and net-zero objectives.

The fund will consist of two main portions. The first will "target places most in need" such as post-industrial towns and deprived rural and coastal communities, in which it will be focused on:

- Supporting local skills and vocational training tailored to local needs, such as work-based training
- Investment in transport improvements, digital connectivity, neighbour and housing improvements, and civic, cultural and sporting facilities
- Investment for local business, including to support innovation, adoption of new technologies, and a low-carbon transition

The second part of the UKSPF will be targeted at people rather than places and will deliver employment and skills programmes to improve outcomes for "specific cohorts of people who face labour market barriers."

UK Shared Prosperity Funding has now been allocated with Thurrock receiving £1,231,415 in core funding which is heavily weighted towards delivery in 2024/2025 (around two thirds of the money available at this point) with three main themes (Community and Place, Supporting Local Business and People and Skills). This will be managed by the Economic development team. A local organisation- One Community, has already been identified within the investment plans and it is proposed that they will receive funding. One Community aims to help local residents with advice, skills development, access to training, life coaching, information English improvement classes, work clubs space to carry out partnership work as well as a wide range of other services, all of which are a good developmental fit to follow on from this programme. Additional funding has been received for Multiply via the Department for Education, supporting adults with mathematics, this funding totals £1,144,939 over the next two years which will be led by Thurrock Adult Community College, where there is budget set aside for engagement and funding for the voluntary sector.

Tilbury has also been selected by the UK Government to receive a share of the £3.6B Towns Fund, a vital part of the Government's Levelling Up agenda. The area is one of just 101 places to benefit from this fund and will potentially receive up to £25m to help improve infrastructure, drive economic growth and increase job opportunities within the area.⁴

⁴ [Tilbury Town Fund](#)

It has been shown that vital partnerships with the Social Enterprise and Community and Voluntary Organisations will be key for future bidding opportunities and for delivery. This brings the benefits of local “on the ground” knowledge, trusted partners of individuals and supports local organisations in their development. However, larger partnerships must be formed to increase the impact and show a wide ranging offering within future funds, which has been seen recently in multiple overlapping applications across the country into the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, particularly seen in the south of the country over the past few months.

6.3. Building on the CLLD Experience

- To achieve future funding opportunities and the opportunities to deliver wider impact within this area further partnerships should be formed with organisations such as District Councils, LEPS, CLLDs and Chambers of Commerce to ensure a precise conjoined approach across the County, rather than a “scattergun” approach as seen within past funds such as European Regional Development, and in recent UK Shared Prosperity Fund applications regionally. The project team have highlighted that discussions to align future spend within the region have been difficult, but there are devolution discussions underway, with coordination at the wider South Essex Level with engagement with [The Association of South Essex Local Authorities \(ASELA\)](#).
- To be aware of timelines within the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, with underspend being returned to the DLUHC across 2024, this may lead to a new opportunity to bid for additional funding, which would lead to short delivery opportunities that could further support the area but would require agile working and the ability to deliver projects at pace
- Community led and local boards are key (particularly in view of the current LAG) for future funding opportunities. The priority in Government is to provide funding for local projects supporting local people, with a key emphasis on local delivery, engagement and knowledge. It is felt within the Government that local organisations are most aware of the situation “on the ground” and have the trust and knowledge of local people to provide the most support.⁵
- It is vital for future funding that impact across individual organisations is measured to future highlight the strength of local delivery. This is to highlight the need and requirements of the area in future funding bids, and strengthens the viability of working within such partnerships. Local organisations would require additional support in assessing this impact on an individual basis and this could be considered when applying for future bids. It is worthwhile utilising in-house impact reporting or utilising external skills alongside mid and end point assessments.
- The UK Government has proposed new categories and codes to further segment the Charitable and Social Enterprise sectors to provide additional insight into the work that organisations undertake and partnerships that they have. Additional support could be provided through future bids to assist charitable organisations in

⁵ HM Treasury, Spending Review 2020, CP 330, The Stationery Office, November 2020

their development of this, as testing was undertaken up to April 2022 with roll out expected in the near future (particularly in line with the UK Shared Prosperity Fund). This is insightful particularly if, in future development the Third Sector is utilised for delivery.

- Additional scope to support the development of partner organisations is a clear fit for future funding opportunities, and was highlighted as a weakness by partner organisations across regional projects. Additional funding could be secured to provide a range of development opportunities to upskill and increase the impact of partner organisations particularly within the VCS. Other areas of suggested support within the UK have found that grant support to partner organisations would give the freedom to determine what support is required and best suited to the organisation, with funding restricted to development.
- VCS organisations are likely to be vital partners for future delivery and engagement The UK Government highlights that Charities remain the second most trusted of organisations with local people, with Doctors being first. The organisations are often working with those most marginalised in society who often are not engaged in traditional means of support, and so have a unique insight and ability to engage with people that the public and private sectors are unable to. The sector provides a range of routes to employment, not only through voluntary activities for individuals to gain experience, but also in the growth of their own services, or through their wide and varied networks that they have access to. It has been further highlighted that the UK's charities contribute around £20B into the UK's economy (around 0.9% of GDP) and this figure continues to steadily grow, highlighting a route for future economic benefit in engaging with this sector in more detail.
- Partnerships with organisations such as UCAS (for post 16 learning), the apprenticeship hubs, local universities or banking organisations such as the Lloyds Bank Academy, would provide a larger opportunistic approach by combining the local knowledge of partner organisations, with Private Sector and Educational knowledge and opportunities (such as work experience).

As the UK Government continues to implement new strategies and funding streams, additional funds may come in the coming months, or years, especially with the UK Government elections due in 2024. The above points will be useful in applying for and achieving future funding opportunities.

6.4. Lessons Learnt and Future Recommendations

1. Where participants are far from the job market online communication does not appear to be as effective as face-to-face contact. Offering online/telephone initial contact appears to generate only very limited new engagement. The project also identified that lack of personal contact severely impacts building trust between the participant and supporter and thence confidence in taking action. Trust requires time and multiple

engagements. The evidence from thousands of calls, emails and messaging undertaken during lockdown suggests that this is not only an issue for older residents.

Recommendation

For those hardest to reach, early engagement needs to be in person and trust built over time. Online tools/telephone/social apps may be useful later in the participant journey. IF.

2. The use of local community hubs appears to be a positive way to engage residents. It also provides a 'relaxed' site where computer equipment can be available for online applications and job searching.

Recommendation

In future community-based programmes look to incorporate hub space as part of the support offer.

3. Working with community organisations to build local trust is important but where projects are run using public money, a publicly funded anchor organisation could provide proactive support for data and evidence management, claims, budget reviews and general administration. This may allow smaller organisations with less administrative capacity to engage and minimise risk of failure to deliver.

Recommendation

Build collaborative community projects around the skills and reach of local organisations rather than requiring them to be able to undertake all elements of delivery.

4. Programmes which actively link national support bodies such as the DWP, JCP, local public sector and community organisations jointly combine to communicate, offer and support are more likely to be successful. Action still remains siloed, GDPR compliant use of participant data is highly limited and programmes are potentially competitive.

Recommendation

An improved forum for national and local government organisations to build effective local delivery partnerships.

5. Communication was most effective when it was multimedia/route and a key part of all project set up and organisational delivery. Delivery of communications are most likely to be both at project and local delivery partner level.

Recommendation

We recommend that an anchor institution takes responsibility for a comms plan and helps organisations provide clarity of offer. Funding for communications may be covered by one or all project partners but it needs to be coordinated to build a presence over time.

6. Whilst the project appears to have been successful in working with local residents with disability and from a range of ethnicities more could be done to engage and support groups with protected characteristics.

Recommendation

Consider offering a translation service for ethnic minority groups within the area. Residents who are deaf/hard of hearing or blind could be provided with marketing and support materials in brail, and online social media content could have the addition of a sign language interpreter or close captions.

7. SME business engagement is difficult in Tilbury, with few business groups or organisations operating in the area. It is made more so currently as the Thurrock area has no Growth Hub service. Whilst the council have built up a database of registered companies they have no direct way of reaching sole traders.

Recommendation

To facilitate further business support offers the local growth team at Thurrock Council should continue to build their local business database to ensure they can communicate with SMEs.

8. Whilst the detailed evidence requirements, especially for participant eligibility were very difficult for many of the delivery organisations and participants, future programmes do need to ensure a level of rigour, as indicated in UKSPF. This is particularly the case for ESF type support.

Recommendation

Consider how rigour of evidence could be provided at different stages of support which would be proportionate and appropriate to the delivery being provided.

In Conversation with Charlie Blackburn, Project Manager for Inspiring Tilbury

Inspiring Tilbury is an ESF project that supports the residents of Tilbury to develop their skills, find routes to securing employment and overcome any barriers or challenges they face in doing so.

They do this by offering general careers advice, employability training, CV writing and interview coaching and industry and sector specific support. Whilst the project has seen most success with younger residents who are 18-20, a benefit of the project is that it does support participants of all ages.

The Inspiring Tilbury project is responsible for achieving the majority of the outcomes delivered on the ESF element of the CLLD programme and in conversation with their Project Manager Charlie Blackburn, the passion for providing the residents of Tilbury with opportunities for both personal and economic betterment was clear.

The success of Inspiring Tilbury can be attributed to a number of factors; the project team had existing connections within education, with a valuable Careers Advisor linked to the Gateway Academy; relationships were built with training providers and they were able to offer sector specific training and advice, such as connecting participants interested in construction with South Essex Construction Training Academy. Additionally they also had a physical presence at a location on Brennan Road, which enabled more face-to-face interaction which was identified as key to building trust with the residents.

The project team also had the resource and the data to take a proactive approach to potential beneficiaries during lockdown which benefitted them hugely in comparison to just providing information online or utilising just email contact. The mixed media approach with multiple contacts had a positive impact on recruitment.

By the end of March 2023 they reported a total of:

- 5,238 calls made
- 4,669 texts made
- 6,235 emails sent
- 228 clients interested
- 437 homes visited
- 576 1-1 interviews

Charlie Blackburn said “It is incredibly important that we meet the needs of our clients. Whilst delivering the project outcomes is a priority, ensuring the right support is provided to every individual we engage with is equally important.”

A number of case studies were shared and discussed and it was clear that whilst not every intervention equated to a project outcome, the impact of the support on the participants’ lives was invaluable. One particular case study was of supporting a SEND client to start training for a career in a niche industry. The case study reflected the numerous challenges faced but the persistence and the belief in the client that the Advisor had meant that the client’s goal was achieved, which very likely would not have happened without the support.

In a second case study, one Advisor took the step of supporting a client to catch the bus for the first time, building their confidence in their ability to be independent and remove the barrier of travelling to work. This case study, along with others, highlighted the breadth and longevity of the interventions and the positive impact that was had upon those supported.



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