



**European Union**

European Structural  
and Investment Funds

**Item 3 European Structural and  
Investment Funds  
2014 - 2020**

**Growth Programme for England**

## **ESI Funds Growth Programme Board**

Programme Communications Activities 2023 and Activity Plan for 2024

### **Purpose:**

To provide the Board with an overview of the headline communication activities carried out by DLUHC and DWP during 2023 and to verbally share with the Board the 2024 Communications Activity Plan (2024 Activity Plan shared in writing with members in December as required by EC regulation).

### **Recommendation(s):**

**That the board:**

- (i) note the communications activities undertaken in 2023; and**
- (ii) note the 2024 Communications Activity Plan.**

### **Summary:**

DLUHC and DWP are required to deliver a range of communications activities to promote European Programmes and their benefits and impact across England. An overarching communications strategy was approved by the PMC in 2015 and updated in late 2016. Annual communications activity plans should be viewed by the Programme Monitoring Committee every year.

This paper summarises the key communications activities carried out by the managing authorities during 2023. It also includes communications activity plan for 2024 (Annex A) which was adopted after being shared in writing with members with December GPB papers.

During 2023 communications were delivered through a variety of channels with messages and information shared in an effective and timely manner with target audiences ensuring the managing authorities met regulatory requirements.

A summary of headline activities delivered is provided below in the main body of this paper.

## **Programme communications activities 2023**

Programme communications are delivered, wherever possible, on shared platforms and as joint activities across ERDF and ESF. The annual communications activity plan is also a joint document, although itemised and in some cases specific to each programme.

### **ERDF and ESF Major Annual Communications Activities**

There is a formal EC requirement for each managing authority to deliver a major annual communication activity.

The ERDF Annual Information Activity was delivered in the form of a special bulletin focussing in on project closure and featuring some project case studies. It was circulated during the first half of December providing timely and important information to projects, partners and stakeholders in relation to where we were with the programme and important steps that needed/need to be taken over the coming months. It also showcased some of the positive work our fund has supported across various sectors in England.

The main ESF Annual Information Activity is the publishing of a [2023 ESF Programme booklet](#) on GOV.UK, which was undertaken in November. This features

- a brief update on the Programme's implementation and references the ceasing of delivery activity from 31 December 2023 / transition into a Programme Closure process.
- information about ESF projects; and links to past annual ESF booklets published on GOV.UK / The National Lottery Community Fund Building Better Opportunities website for project examples.
- information about management of the Programme and links to supporting information published on GOV.UK, including ESF annual information reports and citizens summaries from 2017 – 2021, plus to the Growth Programme Board page.
- a summary of DWP ESF Evaluation activity and published evaluations to date and emerging high level findings; and a reference to the final DWP ESF evaluation reports due to be published in 2024.
- contact details for anyone seeking additional information.

In summary, as well as providing a 2023 update on progress, the booklet provides a unique 'legacy' landing page that sets out the basics about the Programme and its management, plus many links to what has been delivered over the years and to national evaluations. A supporting ESIF Partner Bulletin was circulated to promote the publishing of the booklet.

### **ESIF pages on GOV.UK [www.gov.uk/european-growth-funding](http://www.gov.uk/european-growth-funding)**

This is the official website portal for the programme - required by EC regulation. It is built into the existing GOV.UK website structure and contains important programme documents, guidance and governance information. It's home to the fully searchable 'funding finder' tool

where project calls for the ESIF programme have been published and also houses older and current versions of the Annual Implementation Reports, previous project case study booklets, key programme guidance, the list of beneficiaries (updated twice a year) and branding and publicity requirements.

Overall, the pages on GOV.UK have been maintained and updated to ensure they are fit for purpose.

The ESF MA continues to publish ESF Action Notes to inform grant recipients of new or updated programme related actions or matters they need to be aware of.

The ERDF and ESF MAs are working individually and together on plans for the review and phased withdrawal of GOV.UK ESIF website page content, the majority of which is likely to be undertaken in 2024 and 2025. Decisions will be based on the business / customer need for pages / content to remain live. Withdrawn content will continue to be visible – but it will clearly be stated ‘Withdrawn’.

The ERDF and ESF List of Beneficiaries has been updated and published on the GOV.UK pages twice in 2023, in line with the requirement on this in the regulations.

ERDF project final reports and the Interim Impact Evaluation Report for the programme (plus appendices) have been published on the dedicated [ERDF Evaluation page](#)

From January to the end of December 2023, these pages received 45,795 page views which is in line with expectations at this stage of programme (the annual target for 2023 was 40,000 page views).

## **Partner Bulletins and Notifications – ESIF, ERDF and ESF**

Direct branded email bulletins have been used to share programme updates. The ESIF Partner Bulletin and separate fund bulletins were produced including the ERDF Practitioner Network Bulletin; and ESF Action Notes about specific guidance and other delivery related issues. Bulletins are also circulated to a mailing list of ESF project/partner subscribers.

The ESIF Partner Bulletin mailing list has again been used this year to share programme specific bulletins and annual information activities. Programme specific bulletins and notifications continued to be circulated when necessary to their respective stakeholders;

The ERDF Practitioner Bulletin has been used during the year to support messages on Post Closure Audits, State Aid and Closure, as well as updating ERDF partners on programme details and developments.

## **Evaluation Communications – ERDF**

DLUHC have worked hard over the course of 2023 to support projects in the completion of their evaluation/summative assessment through various communications and to publicise the evaluation of the ERDF programme as it is drawn to a conclusion. Much of the publicity centres around and points to our dedicated GOV.UK ERDF [evaluation page](#). The Final Evaluation documentation, submitted to the European Commission in 2023, will be published on this page in 2024.

A partner bulletin featuring summative assessment was circulated in April and internally contract managers continued to receive support and information this area of work. Around 190 final reports are now available on our dedicated evaluation page on GOV.UK, as is the phase 2 'Interim Impact Evaluation Report' along with two appendices.

## **Evaluation communications – ESF**

There have been no further ESF evaluation publications during 2023. The main focus has been on continuation of the participant leavers survey and development of the programme level impact analysis, findings from both of which we aim to publish summer 2024 subject to Ministerial approvals. These will be the final published outputs from the evaluation programme.

## **Internal Communications Activities**

Managing authorities use a broad range of internal communications activities to ensure staff are kept informed of programme developments, messages communicated externally and broader Department news.

For ERDF staff, the managing authority has used a variety of tools to keep staff updated and informed. Case studies, intranet articles, direct emails, calls and use of the DLUHC Hub 'intranet' site were among some of the tools used. Regular Teams calls take place within the ERDF network to highlight any programme developments that staff need to be aware of.

For ESF staff the managing authority use an internal ESF 'iBoard', Teams and SharePoint based 'intranet' that incorporates links to all internal and external documents and other information to support delivery of the programme. It also keeps colleagues updated on latest news and information. Newsflashes and regular Newsletters/Blogs are posted on the ESF iBoard where there is important information to communicate directly.

ESFD staff also attend regular All colleague 'Teams' calls that address all aspects of Programme management and implementation; plus HR and wellbeing related matters and good news stories and films from projects, including participant journeys.

In October 2023 ESF MA staff attended a national Divisional event in Sheffield that focused on a wide range of delivery, closure and supporting HR matters. The opportunity to meet together and discuss issues has had positive feedback.

## **Reports and Papers**

Progress reports and project case studies provided for the Annual Implementation Report. Additionally, a programme of 6 monthly reporting to Local ESIF Committee members continued. Local reports covering ERDF and ESF (for each LEP area) were compiled and distributed to local members. This process will continue into 2024, with final reports to be distributed in March.

## **March 2024**

**Rob Martell and Rachel Sylvester**

Annex A – Communications annual activity plan for 2024 (attached as separate document for info – previously circulated/cleared with December 2023 GPB papers)