

Agenda Item No:	6	
Committee:	Cabinet	
Date:	16 June 2025	
Report Title:	Rural England Shared Prosperity Fund 2025-26	

Cover sheet:

1 Purpose / Summary

- 1.1 The Rural England Shared Prosperity Fund (REPF) builds on and is a top-up to the Governments Shared Prosperity Fund and is available only to eligible rural local authorities in England.
- 1.2 The funding available to Fenland District is for £130k over a transitional one-year period 2025-26 and will support the continuation of the 2022-25 REPF rural business grant scheme.

2 Key Issues

- 2.1 Acceptance of £130k REPF from the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) for a transitional one-year period ending March 31st, 2026.
- 2.2 To delegate to Officers responsibility for approving and finalising with the CPCA the REPF Grant Funding Agreement.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 Cabinet is requested to consider and recommend acceptance of Rural England Shared Prosperity Fund from the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority for a one-year period 2025-26.
- 3.2 Cabinet is requested to consider and recommend that officers be delegated to approve and finalise with the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority the Rural England Shared Prosperity Fund Grant Funding Agreement 2025-26.

Wards Affected	Eligible Wards only – excludes Wisbech
Forward Plan Reference	KEY/15MAY25/01
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Steve Count
Report Originator(s)	Anna Goodall, Assistant Director Simon Jackson, Economic Growth Manager
Contact Officer(s)	Simon Jackson, Economic Growth Manager
Background Papers	

Report:

1 BACKGROUND AND INTENDED OUTCOMES

- 1.1 The Rural England Shared Prosperity Fund (REPF) has been retained to maintain support for businesses and communities prior to the introduction of the Government's Industrial Strategy to be launched in 2026.
- 1.2 All areas of the UK are receiving an allocation of the funds via a funding formula where the funding available to Fenland District is £130k over a transitional one-year period 2025-26.
- 1.3 The REPF allocated for Fenland will be paid by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA). As per the previous Grant Funding Agreement (GFA) the District Council will claim in arrears the funding from the CPCA.
- 1.4 The REPF will support the continuation of the 2022-25 REPF rural business grant scheme.
- 1.5 The project will continue to be managed and delivered by the Council's Economic Growth Team. The project will maintain the involvement of Cambridgeshire ACRE in assessing grant bids and making recommendations to the Council's Grant Team for final decisions on grant applications. The Council's Grants Team consists of Officers from Finance, Audit, Communications and Economic Growth.
- 1.6 The key elements of the REPF Business Grant project are:
 - A maximum grant of up to £10k per business.
 - Businesses will need to contribute a minimum of 50% towards the total cost of the project.
 - Only businesses with between 2 and 40 employees will be eligible.
 - Only businesses located within the defined Fenland REPF area.
 - Capital grants will be available for businesses to promote business growth and diversification and for the purchase of for example capital equipment, expansion of business premises and so on.
- 1.7 The criteria used in assessing applications for REPF will include:
 - Projects that create and sustain rural jobs.
 - The diversification of income streams.
 - Certain types of rural businesses will receive priority including farming, suppliers to farming businesses, manufacturing and tourism businesses.

2 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The REPF helps support the delivery of the Council's economic growth and communities' corporate objectives.

- 2.2 The business grant project has the greatest potential to deliver new, inclusive and sustainable growth opportunities for the District's residents and businesses.

3 CONSULTATION

- 3.1 Engagement with partners and evaluation on current provision such as via the CPCA Growth HUB has enabled external views and policies to be incorporated into the proposed REPF business grant project.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 The REPF is a specific funding opportunity with no comparable alternative options. Acceptance of the funding provides an opportunity to deliver the outcomes to be specified in the CPCA's REPF GFA and is a requirement of receiving the funding. The REPF agreement will be subject to appropriate legal oversight to ensure that Fenland District Council's position is adequately protected.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Legal Implications

- 5.2 Powers: FDC will enter into the funding and partnership arrangements with CPCA and grant recipients using its powers under Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011.
- 5.3 Contracting: The grant funding agreements with FDC will not impose any unacceptable risks or obligations on FDC and that, to the extent feasible, risks and obligations will flow down to the end grant recipients through appropriate grant funding agreements to mitigate FDC's risk.
- 5.4 Procurement: The awards will be made via a grant funding agreement as opposed to a contract for services, so there will be no relevant public procurement implications.
- 5.5 Subsidy control: The potential awards have been previously externally considered and reviewed for subsidy control compliance with the Subsidy Control Act 2022. There will be no subsidy to FDC as FDC will be acting during its public functions and, in any event, will not receive any economic advantage from the grants. There will be no subsidy to the end recipients, or the grants will be provided by way of the minimal financial assistance allowance under the Act.

5.6 Financial Implications

- 5.7 The project is fully externally funded. Whilst FDC will be responsible for administering the various projects there are no significant implications for the FDC budget.
- 5.8 It is currently being assumed that there will be no carry over of the REPF into 2026-27. There is a potential risk that some of the REPF funding may not be

utilised. The project leads is aware of this risk and is undertaking mitigating actions.

5.9 Equality Implications

The project and services have been assessed to ensure equality of access, etc.

7 SCHEDULES

Schedule One – RESPF Business Grant Fund Scheme

Schedule One – REPF Business Grant Fund Scheme

1. The REPF Business Grant Fund Scheme will provide access to pump-priming grant funding in Fenland for rural businesses to enable them to drive local economic growth, productivity, R&D, energy saving, business innovation and skills development to secure access to market opportunities and boost long-term skilled employment.
2. The project will support existing rural businesses with more than 2 and fewer than 40 employees.
3. The project will be managed by the District Council's Economic Growth Team (EGT) ensuring quick mobilisation of the project.
4. Rural businesses will submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) form to the EGT for consideration. Once assessed using a standardised scoring process those applicants that exceed the scoring threshold will be invited to complete the full grant application form and will receive support to complete the form from the EGT.
5. Those businesses invited to complete a Full Application Form submitted into the EGT will be assessed and scored. Each Application Form will be supported by the EGT who will also ensure due diligence, supporting evidence has been provided, subsidy control has been reviewed, etc.
6. The grant decision making process will be advised by the Chief Executive Officer of Cambridgeshire ACRE. The final decision on whether to support an application will be made by the Council's REPF Grants Team consisting of Officers from Finance, Audit, Communications and Economic Growth.
7. A council cannot contract out its decision making to another body unless it is permitted by the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act. The decision on whether to support an application will be made by the Council's REPF Grants Team. Decisions relating to the allocation of funding will be published on the Council's website in line with transparency requirements and the associated exemptions under Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.
8. The Chief Executive Officer of Cambridgeshire ACRE will have access to information about businesses that have applied for an REPF grant including potentially commercially sensitive data. The Chief Executive will be required to declare any conflicts of interest with any applicant business before the application is considered. All applicants will be made aware that their application will be seen by Chief Executive Officer and what the application process is so that they can equally flag any potential concerns to the Council before their data is shared. The application pack will include a privacy statement to ensure we are compliant with GDPR, transparent and how the data will be shared with others to assess and determine the application.
9. If an applicant is dissatisfied with the outcome, they can request a review of the decision. The review will be undertaken by a group of Council officers, including

the Corporate Director and Chief Finance Officer (s151 officer) and the Monitoring Officer. This officer group may wish to consult with the Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth and Portfolio Holder for Finance on any complex decisions.

10. Grant requests up to a maximum of £10,000 will be considered. The requirement for a private sector match of at least 50% increases ownership by the applicant and increases the return on investment for the project.