

Post-EU regional development funding

The Committee would welcome your views on any or all the issues covered in the terms of reference, and in particular on the following questions:

How effective were EU Structural Funds at transforming the Welsh economy?

From a Monmouthshire perspective:

- Reducing the number of young people (11 -16 years) becoming NEET (not in education, employment, or training) positive impact on the Welsh economy. Good engagement and performance. However small number of young people with multiple barriers were still unable to transition into further education, training, and employment. Eligibility requirement meant some were not eligible for support, particularly those who had been impacted by covid and were referred to agencies for support.
- Reducing youth unemployment as well as education and training opportunities. Good engagement and performance. However, employment opportunities tended to be low skilled employment and many applying for the same jobs. Run on a one-to-one basis, rather than group basis, which was not expected.
- Upskilling for people in work with no qualifications up to a level 2. Good engagement and performance upskilling from level 1 to level2 qualifications improved employment opportunities
- Rural Development Programme grants to develop community facilities and events improved community connectivity and cohesion. Legacy that will not be re-ignited through SPF funding.
- EU funds has had a positive impact on our local economy has provided much needed support, guidance, and expertise into the world of work. Further impact and transformation will be seen over the coming years.

How will the funding that Wales receives from the Shared Prosperity Fund and the tail-off of remaining EU Structural Funds compare to the level of funding that Wales received through Structural Funds while the UK was a member of the EU and any potential funding that could have been received through the next Structural Funds programme?

Monmouthshire has received the lowest allocation of SPF compared to other local authorities in Southeast Wales. This is a real challenge for the authority to prioritise what really matters and what will transform our economy and communities over the next few

years. This is not like for like what we did received from the EU and the timeframe for SPF is a concern no long-term commitment ends March 2025.

Which elements of the two funds have worked well so far, and which have been less effective? What lessons could be learnt from this for the future to maximise the impact of the funds?

EU structural Funding very clear guidance and requirements in a very timely and achievable manner, compared to SPF, which is improving challenges as documentation is delayed which is frustrating as we can only provide reassurance and our expertise to what SPF projects need to do working based on experience from EU funding specification requirements. EU structural funding had specific requirement and eligibility, therefore, little movement for flexibility and creativity. Measured on the result and little consideration given to the journey to get to the result. High expectations and not taking into consideration demographic and external factors which can impact on performance. We are led to believe that SPF is flexible, and a degree of creativity and the governance, accountability and compliance sits with the local authority and lead authority allowing autonomy. Outputs measurements allow for recognition of the work if outcome underperforms.

Monmouthshire EU funded programmes finished end of December 2022 and we had to transition into SPF from 1st January 2023. The Community Renewal Fund set the scene for SPF. Lessons Learnt include managing project performance and evidence, setting out our requirements expectations, clear reporting monitoring progresses, timely deadlines etc.

To what extent are the funds successfully identifying and supporting the communities and areas of Wales that are in greatest need? How does the geographical spread of the Shared Prosperity Fund and Levelling Up Fund compared to Structural Funds?

What types of interventions are being delivered and designed through the Shared Prosperity Fund, and to what extent do these differ from those delivered through Structural Funds?

There are a range of interventions across the 3 themes, as follows:

- Communities and Place investment projects demonstrate strengthen social fabric, sense of community and pride and develop capacity to drive grassroots change.
- Supporting Local Business investment projects show support local productivity, local business development alongside providing sector specific support.
- People and Skills investment projects demonstrate improve opportunities for our citizens to gain sustainable employment to those furthest away from the labour market; contributing towards helping citizens to upskill to meet labour market demands

People and Skills investment – Inspire and CELT and Communities and Place investment Gwent Green Grid Project is very similar to those delivered through structural funds.

How helpful are the processes and timescales set by the UK Government for the funds in supporting local authorities and regions to achieve their intended outcomes?

Processes and timescales have been challenging from the beginning, documentation has been delayed which has put unnecessary pressure on local authorities and clarity of intended outcome information not clear ambiguous at times However UK government colleagues have been very supportive and good lines of communication.

How effectively are the different levels of governance in Wales working together in relation to these funds?

Monmouthshire is part of the Southeast regional with Rhonda Cynon Taff as the Lead Authority. Levels of governance have only recently been agreed and contained within our Service Level Agreement, so it is early days to comment on the effectiveness of this.

What challenges and opportunities do these funding streams provide for organisations who received Structural Funds?

SPF investment is not the same level of investment as structural funds, therefore, it's not like for like challenging conversations and decisions what is best for the county what will have the most impact and make a real difference to our Communities, People and Businesses

How is the Multiply programme developing across different parts of Wales? What are the potential barriers and opportunities in relation to delivering this programme?

Difficult to answer - in Gwent. we are all roughly at the same stage (appointed co-ordinators, exploring procurement). We are meeting in May to look through resources to support each other and not duplicate, due to time pressures.)

Barriers - lack of tutors, hence why we have gone higher and targeted qualified teachers, although that brings in other barriers such as availability to start (September, 18 months left on project)

For Monmouthshire- appropriately sized and available rooms to deliver courses/workshops

Opportunities - Lots of e-learning flying around to help support delivery (not accredited though,)