

# DELIVERING THE UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND

## Principles for partnership with voluntary and specialist organisations

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With the publication of the [prospectus for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund \(UKSPF\)](#), local authorities have an opportunity to break down siloes, build new partnerships, and design and deliver integrated services based on the needs of their communities.

Charities and specialist organisations, such as colleges and social housing providers, draw on deep knowledge of their communities to tackle complex and intersecting needs by investing in social infrastructure.

[Investment in social infrastructure](#) – the places, organisations and activities that connect people and create communities – must be at the heart of delivering the UKSPF. Social resources ranging from parks and sports facilities to healthcare, education and training, and youth services are crucial to helping people lead better lives and participate meaningfully in society and the economy.

Working in partnership across sectors will also support lead authorities to embed the goals of advancing equality, eliminating discrimination, and fostering inclusion in delivering the UKSPF. In addition to the ethical and legal imperatives to protect and ensure equal opportunities for all, a more equal society is the key to our shared prosperity. Importantly, this will also better position communities to generate local opportunities and become more economically resilient.

Partnership working must also include clear co-ordination with devolved governments and an approach that ensures the development of distinct programme aims that complement, rather than overlap with, local and devolved policies, strategies and programmes.

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The following principles for delivering the UKSPF have been developed by a coalition of thirty-two voluntary and specialist organisations. They are intended to support the development and delivery of holistic interventions that reduce inequality, create opportunity, and deliver economic benefit.

**1. Take a multi-agency, multi-sector approach.** The UKSPF should be led through partnerships that develop community-driven solutions and build social cohesion. Lead authorities have been advised to form [local partnership groups](#). Charities and specialist organisations must be key members of these groups, in part to help local authorities effectively link with existing provision, including national programmes, and identify service gaps. Their participation will help to avoid duplication, reduce competition for referrals between service providers, and enable a “no wrong door” approach for service users. It will also help agencies achieve shared outcomes.

Support should be holistic and cater for people with complex and intersecting needs. For example, an approach to delivering education, training and employment support that is based on local needs and spans organisations and sectors could simultaneously help address other interrelated issues, such as poor housing, social isolation, and physical and mental health.

Strong partnerships will not only facilitate better service integration, but also provide significant cost savings and enable better sharing of information and good practice.

Crucially, this approach will help to engage traditionally marginalised groups by expanding the reach of a project or programme. These communities often know and trust local service providers, and in return these organisations understand the challenges these communities face.

The [Plymouth Alliance](#) model shows how charities and local government can work in partnership to deliver holistic, value-for-money services that are built around not only the needs but also the strengths of people who use them.

- 2. Work with voluntary and specialist organisations to involve service users.** Service users have unique insight into the complexity of their own lives and what works to support them, which can then inform and improve services. It will therefore be critical to enable people with lived experience to be part of planning, developing, and delivering the UKSPF in their areas.
- 3. Embed equality and inclusion from the start.** Using protected characteristics under the Equality Act alongside measures of socioeconomic disadvantage, local areas must identify the people and groups who are at risk of and/or are experiencing inequality, discrimination, and abuse. This includes women, Black and minority ethnic communities, disabled people, LGBTQ+ people, and people locked in poverty. Support for these groups may be traditionally under-funded due to structural inequality. Embedding equality and inclusion will support local authorities to meet Equality Act duties and deliver the UKSPF effectively for the whole population.
- 4. Use appropriate commissioning processes and procurement methods.** This is essential for maintaining a diverse provider market and making sure as much money as possible is channelled to the frontline. It is also particularly important to think about future-proofing procurement methods in the context of rapidly rising inflation.

Where possible, grants should be the preferred procurement method. Competitive grant making often provides excellent value for money. The benefits of using grants have been highlighted by [the Lloyds Bank Foundation](#) and [NHS England](#). These include supporting the sustainability of smaller providers, enabling charities to use other in-kind help, particularly volunteering, and allowing organisations to innovate and test new approaches.

Funders can manage risk when making grants by, for example, building in staged payments, robust reporting, and clear grant agreements. Indeed, grant funding can avoid being overly prescriptive or locking providers into set ways of running their services, to the benefit of service users.

- 5. Where services are procured using contracts, these should be appropriately sized.** This is particularly important for non-mainstream, specialist interventions, and would enable a greater proportion of smaller providers to participate as prime or lead contractors, rather than just subcontractors. When deciding the suitability of different contract sizes, existing relationships with service users, the size of the target group, the ability and willingness of the provider market to deliver certain contract sizes, the extent of specialist services required, and an assessment of whether larger contracts can deliver economies of scale and lower unit costs should all be carefully considered.
- 6. Cover overhead costs of service providers, regardless of procurement method.** This is particularly important for smaller organisations, who often struggle to cover core costs in

contracts and grants. At the heart of this is the need for a greater weighting towards upfront funding than was possible with EU structural funding.

- 7. Work closely with civil society to build and use evidence.** Levelling up must be based on transparent and robust evidence that measures outcomes for communities and the impact of interventions on places. This includes using data from voluntary and specialist organisations to understand inequality and address gaps in official data. It also means working in partnership to develop and report on local, regional and national metrics that relate to meaningful change.

Charities and specialist organisations do not merely provide essential support for communities – they are at the heart of how people want to live their lives. They give people a way to shape and take pride in their communities, and express interest or take action on issues they care about. Embedding strategic partnerships and community participation in the delivery of the UKSPF will be essential to build pride in place, increase life chances, and improve quality of life for all.

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**On behalf of the UKSPF coalition, which includes:**

Association of Colleges

Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP)

Charity Finance Group

Communities That Work

Cornwall Neighbourhoods for Change

Employment Services Related Association (ERSA)

Equally Ours

Lloyds Bank Foundation

National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)

Network for Europe

Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA)

NPC

Partnership for Young London

Salvation Army

Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO)

St Vincent de Paul Society

Voluntary Organisations' Network North East (VONNE)

WCVA