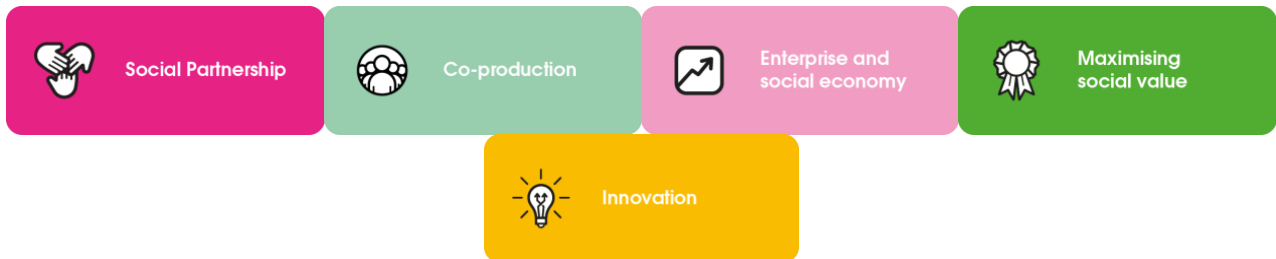




COMMUNITY



Medway Council

Medway's Community-Led Approach to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund

When Medway Council received its allocation of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), it chose to hand power to communities through an open, community-led grant model. Medway faces challenges seen across many local authority areas, including pockets of deprivation and uneven access to cultural/economic opportunity. To strengthen civic pride alongside physical regeneration, Medway took the view that Place-based interventions cannot be delivered solely through capital investment or council-designed programmes. Instead, interventions required residents and local organisations to have influence over the activities that shape where they live, work, learn and visit.

The Approach

Since 2022, Medway has invested £2.4 million through the UKSPF across nearly 150 projects, supporting eligible groups across the area. Rather than designing projects from the top-down, the council opened an application process to any legally constituted entity across Medway.

The council's UKSPF programme offered three funding streams:

1. Pride in Place Fund – supporting cultural / community projects (building capacity of local groups, infrastructure and encouraging people to explore the local area).
2. Feasibility Fund – providing seed funding for longer-term project development.
3. Summer Events Fund – encouraging large-scale community events to foster pride and attract visitors to Medway.

In Year 3 (2024 to 2025), £1,179,438 was funded into 55 projects. The council held a launch event and delivered direct support sessions to organisations that sought them. This was important for smaller organisations and those without prior experience of applying for public funding. A help booklet was developed, providing guidance for each application question, and was designed as a lasting resource for organisations to use in future applications.

Impact

The funded initiatives showcased the diversity and creativity of Medway's communities, while also generating both social and economic value. Over Years 1 - 3, the programme directly engaged 246,727 people, representing all individuals that could be reached by the organisations delivering the projects. It enabled 741 organisations to access non-financial support, organised 270 events, rehabilitated 8 premises, and created or improved 108 facilities.

In Year 3, the Chinese New Year Festival attracted thousands of visitors to Chatham High Street, highlighting Medway as an inclusive and lively area. The LV21 RiverSwell project moved a historic lightship to Chatham Dockyard, reconnecting communities with Medway's river heritage. Ideas Test's Luton Light Trail organised a festive light display from Diwali to Christmas across the Luton part of Chatham. Community workshops produced 24 artworks, alongside pieces by local artists and collaborations, bringing together 220 residents at a final showcase event. The Trail demonstrated how even small amounts of funding can unite previously divided communities; such hyper-local initiatives can empower areas often seen negatively.



Luton Lights - Ideas Test

Year 3 also featured a People and Skills strand. Medway Plus organised inclusive trips for children and young people with special educational needs (SEND) to historic and cultural sites across Medway. Volunteer It Yourself carried out improvements at Strood Amateur Boxing Club and the Anchorian's Club. The project also involved engaging young people who were unemployed or disconnected from education, resulting in 29 Entry Level 3 City and Guilds qualifications achieved. The Twydall and District Community Association used capital funding to restore and safeguard the

future of the Twydall District Community Hub, a vital part of social infrastructure, which became self-sustaining and operated at nearly full capacity every week.

By adopting a community-centred approach to distributing UKSPF funds, residents and local organisations could design and deliver projects themselves, giving them a genuine stake in the outcome. The council's UKSPF programme also aligned with the wider regeneration strategy, Medway 2041, which prioritises placemaking and growth for all.



Frindsbury Cricket Club Upgrade

Learning and Reflections

Medway's experience provides a model for councils seeking to use discretionary funding to truly strengthen local resilience. Several additional lessons arose from Medway's experience:

- **Maintaining transparency** – Demand originally exceeded available funding, so clear scoring criteria and feedback were essential to maintain trust.
- **The Council's role in capacity-building** – Not all community groups are equipped to navigate the funding process. Engagement sessions and accessible guidance can help empower the applicant pool.
- **Smaller grants could generate social value** – More modest awards are still valuable; they could unlock volunteer time and develop wider community engagement beyond the initial investment.
- **Aligning programmes with Council strategies** – Medway's Shared Prosperity Fund action complemented Medway's 2041 placemaking ambitions, as outlined in the new Local Plan, which linked community-led activity with longer-term regeneration.

Moving Forward

Following the extension of UKSPF into Year 4, Medway is focusing on sustaining the relationships and delivery capacity that have been developed. The administration has committed to self-funding

a successor scheme, rebranded specifically for Medway, ensuring community-led investment in civic pride continues for the next two years and beyond the lifetime of the national fund. The experience has reinforced the value of community-led commissioning models and informed thinking about how future regeneration and discretionary funding can continue to embed local decision-making.

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