



**Funded by
UK Government**



**Nottinghamshire
County Council**



UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) Nottingham & Nottinghamshire

2025 - 2026 Open Call 1 (OC1)

Supporting Business Start-Up

Invitation to bid

March 2025

This programme is funded by the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund

1. Introduction

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) was introduced in 2022 as the successor programme to the European Structural Investment Funds (ESIF). It was originally funded until 31 March 2025. The current government has extended this for a further year to 31 March 2026. The original programme was funded directly to Local Authorities by the Government. In 2024 the East Midlands Combined County Authority (EMCCA) was established covering Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire. The Government will issue 2025-26 UKSPF funds to EMCCA who will then allocate some of this funding to Local Authorities to allow them to continue to fund local provision.

Eligible Councils set out their approach in evidence led Investment Plans in 2022. This was approved by the Government. The plan for the programme for 2025-2026 will be to use the available funding to build upon on the successes and achievements to date, in advance of the Government's successor programme, anticipated to start in April 2026.

2. Background

The UKSPF was a central pillar of the previous UK Government's Economic Prosperity improvement agenda and provided £2.6 billion of funding from 2023 to 2025. It has improved pride in place and increased life chances across the UK through investing in communities and place, supporting local business, and people and skills.

The current government has decided to continue funding for UKSPF for a further year before it updates its support programmes from 2026 to 2029. Nationally, there is approximately 60% funding of the 2024-25 budget available in 2025-26.

The UKSPF supported the delivery of the previous Government's missions under three investment priorities: **Communities and Place; Supporting Local Business; and People and Skills.**

Government has published a refreshed prospectus for the UKSPF programme for the 2025-2026 year, which echoes much of the prospectus for the original programme. This [prospectus](#) and a related [Technical Note](#) can be found on the gov.uk website.

The strategic vision for economic growth focuses on fostering a dynamic, sustainable business environment that supports start-ups, growth, innovation, long-term resilience and breaking down barriers to opportunities. By prioritising green growth, investment, and skills development, it ensures businesses & community have the resources to thrive. Targeted support for entrepreneurs, access to finance, and business-friendly policies create opportunities to scale and succeed.

The region focuses on narrowing regional inequalities across a broad range of indicators and, critically, prioritises interventions that directly address those issues most impacting people, businesses, and communities. Therefore, our key priority areas are:

Key Priorities for Supporting Business Start-ups and Entrepreneurs

- Enhancing Economic Prosperity – Reducing regional inequalities in employment, pay, skills, and productivity while fostering a more entrepreneurial, sustainable and inclusive economy.
- Improving Access to Finance – grants, loans, and investment to help start-ups scale and succeed.
- Developing Skills & Mentorship – Offering training, leadership development, and direct expert business guidance.

- Driving Innovation & R&D – Encouraging research, tech adoption, and digital transformation.
- Unlocking Market Opportunities & Expansion – Supporting access to new markets, supply chains, trade & business networks.
- Promoting Sustainability & Resilience – Encouraging green growth, responsible business practices, and long-term adaptability.

This translates into the following funding priorities under UKSPF for 2025-26:

	UKSPF Investment Priorities	Nottingham & Nottinghamshire's UKSPF Funding Priorities
1.	Enterprise Culture and start-up support	Supporting Business Start-Up

The themes of inclusion, productivity and carbon neutrality are interwoven throughout each of Nottingham and Nottinghamshire's priorities.

Open Call	Min grant for 2025-26	Max grant for 2025-26
Supporting Business Start-Up	£395,000 revenue	£408,000 revenue

This funding is taken from the budget that EMCCA has allocated for regional-level activities, rather than the UKSPF funds allocated to individual local authorities to support local projects and activities.

Applicants should note while all parties are hopeful that the funds will be available in due course, this Open Call process is happening before the necessary decision making by EMCCA and by Nottinghamshire County Council has happened. That means that unless and until those decisions are made, no grants will be awarded through this Open Call process.

3. Grant Awards

The funding available for grants awarded through this Open Call will be from the Enterprise Culture and start-up support theme of the 2025-26 UKSPF programme

Please note as this Open Call has been published in support of EMCCA's regional plans for its UKSPF programme and the amount of UKSPF Supporting Local Businesses funding that Nottinghamshire County Council will be allocated to administer, manage and monitor:

- The funding available to an individual organisation is specified is a maximum grant amount.
- It is anticipated that one grant will be issued through this Open Call for N2 Business Start Up Support
- in the event of Nottinghamshire County Council not receiving sufficient funding, no grants will be awarded
- applicants should outline their projects, including the expected outputs and outcomes, for the period from 1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026. Should additional funding become available to extend this provision beyond the specified dates, Nottinghamshire County Council reserves the right to offer further grant funding to successful applicants to support the continuation of their projects.

4. Aims of UKSPF Supporting Business Start-Up Project

Supporting business start-ups, fostering entrepreneurship, and delivering customised support are vital to enhancing productivity, expanding the local business community, and driving economic growth that benefits everyone.

Local Priorities for Supporting Business Start-Ups

Nottinghamshire County Council recognises the role of local businesses in driving forward Nottinghamshire economy and encourages them to play an active role in the vitality of the City and County district and boroughs (Ashfield, Bassetlaw, Broxtowe, Gedling, Mansfield, Newark & Sherwood and Rushcliffe).

Nottinghamshire is a prime location for business, investment, and quality living, offering excellent transport links and a strong, diverse economy. Home to world-class universities and a skilled workforce, the region fosters innovation and enterprise across key sectors. Nottingham, the vibrant heart of the county, is a hub for business, creative culture, and retail, with a thriving start-up scene and major global companies. The region boasts affordable housing, rich history, and beautiful green spaces like Sherwood Forest enhance the quality of life, making Nottinghamshire's districts and boroughs an attractive destination to live, work, and invest in.

The proposed business support interventions are based on research, academic data on how businesses grow, feedback from business in terms of what they need, and have been consulted on locally to support business growth.

5. UKSPF Outputs and Outcomes

The outputs and outcomes associated with the 2025-26 UKSPF interventions are detailed below. The definitions of the outputs and outcomes can be found in Appendix B of the application.

Open Call Outputs and Outcomes

N2 Business Start Up Support

Outputs

- Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support
- Number of enterprises receiving grants
- Number of potential entrepreneurs assisted to be enterprise ready

Outcomes

- Jobs created as a result of support
- Number of new enterprises created as a result of support
- Number of enterprises engaged in new markets
- Number of enterprises adopting new to the firm technologies or processes
- Number of enterprises adopting new or improved products or services

Nottinghamshire County Council aims to award a single grant through this Open Call that supports the development of the local enterprise ecosystem through animating entrepreneurialism within regions communities and supporting the start-up of new businesses.

The Council identifies the following outcomes as key to achieving this goal for the majority of those engaged on this project; to create new enterprises and to create jobs.

6. What costs can be attributed to the grant?

Revenue funds can be used to contribute to the costs of ongoing operational expenses required in the running of the project, including:

- Staff salary costs (including Employer NI and Pension contributions).
- Overheads related to employing staff involved in delivering activities funded through the grant.
- Cost of business travel.
- Marketing and publicity costs
- Grants to enterprises / entrepreneurs
- Small items of equipment (less than £5,000).

7. Timescale and process

Nottinghamshire County Council will run an open call for the 2025-2026 UKSPF programmes.

- Technical Workshop – **7th March 2025**
- Open Call documents published on Nottinghamshire County Council UKSPF webpage – **7th March 2025**
- Deadline for submission of Open Call applications – **23:59 on Sunday 23rd March 2025**
- Grant Agreements issued to successful applicants by **31st March 2025**

The anticipated timescales given above may be subject to change depending on:

- when the Nottinghamshire County Council 2025-26 UKSPF funding allocation is confirmed by EMCCA
- the number of applications received
- timescales for submission and approval of UKSPF 2025-26 Investment Plans (if these are required)

8. How will applications be assessed?

Nottinghamshire County Council will assess all grant applications submitted before the deadline of **23:59 on Sunday 23rd March 2025**.

Assessment will involve four stages; Gateway, Scoring, Moderation and Further Moderation (if required), including sign off of shortlisted applications. Questions that are to be scored have been weighted.

Further information regarding the assessment criteria can be found in Appendix A: UKSPF Nottingham & Nottinghamshire Assessment Criteria.

Following assessment, Nottinghamshire County Council will inform all applicants of their outcome.

Successful applicants will enter into a grant agreement with Nottinghamshire County Council.

9. How to apply

To apply for grant funding, applicants must complete and submit the following documents to Nottinghamshire County Council using the email address: ukspf@nottscc.gov.uk

- N2 Business Start Up Support Application Form
- N2 Business Start Up Support - Budget & Performance Profile
- Evidence of Economic and Financial Standing (1.1 of the application form)

Applications submitted in any other format will not be accepted.

Complete applications must be submitted by: **23:59 on Sunday 23rd March 2025.**

10. Further information

For any technical queries please email: ukspf@nottscc.gov.uk

APPENDIX A: NOTTINGHAM & NOTTINGHAMSHIRE ASSESSMENT CRITERIA (FOR OC1)

Stage 1. GATEWAY CRITERIA

Criteria	Pass	Fail	Partial
Criteria 1: Application signed, fully completed and returned on time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	-
Criteria 2: Economic and Financial Standing*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Criteria 3: Economic and Financial Risk*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Criteria 4: Financial clawback in past 12 months	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Criteria 5: Policies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Criteria 6: Liability Insurance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**These will also be assessed via due diligence checks on Equifax and Spotlight.*

Applications that fail any criterion cannot progress to Stage 2. Scoring.

For the questions which have been assessed as partial, progress to Stage 2 is allowed. Scoring will be allowed with justification from the Assessor.

STAGE 2. SCORING

The maximum score for each question is 5, based on the scoring framework below, but some are weighted through the multiplication of the assigned score. For example, a score of 5 weighted by a factor of 4 will equal a total score of 20. The maximum score and multiplication weightings are shown on the application form in the dark grey box to the right of each question.

SCORING FRAMEWORK

Score	Assessment	Description
0	Unacceptable	Response to the question is unacceptable or no response received. Does not give the Fund confidence in the ability of the bidder to deliver the contract.
1	Poor/Weak Response	Inadequate detail provided or some of the answer not directly relevant to the question. Is supported by none or a weak standard of evidence in several areas giving rise to concern about the ability of the bidder to deliver the contract.
2	Below Expectations	Limited information provided, and/or a response that is inadequate or only partially addresses the question giving rise to concern about the ability of the bidder to deliver the contract.
3	Satisfactory Response	Acceptable response in terms of the level of detail, accuracy and relevance. Is supported by a satisfactory standard of evidence in most areas but a few areas lacking detail/evidence giving rise to some concerns about the ability of the bidder to deliver the contract.
4	Good Response	Comprehensive response in terms of detail and relevance to the question and supported by good standard of evidence. Gives the Fund confidence in the ability of the bidder to deliver the contract. Meets the Fund's requirements.
5	Very Good Response	As Good, but to a better degree in terms of precision and relevance. Is comprehensive and supported by a high standard of evidence. Gives the Fund a high level of confidence in the ability of the bidder to deliver the contract. May exceed the Fund's requirements in some respects, for example, added value such as integration/synergy with other projects.

The weighted score for Part 2 of the application form will be out of 120

Scoring for Appendix B of the application (the excel document)

The financial details in Appendix B will be used to evaluate the value for money of the proposed project.

The number of enterprises and potential entrepreneurs engaged, along with the number achieving each output and outcome, will be used to assess the project's impact and effectiveness.

Higher scores will be awarded to projects that:

- Offer a comprehensive range of support
- Offer comprehensive across the City and Districts within Nottinghamshire
- Focus on key steps for facilitating supporting business start up
- Demonstrate that the support provided will lead to programme outcomes

Weightings will be applied to certain criteria to reflect their relative importance in the proposal.

To prevent all applicants from submitting figures that would guarantee maximum scores in the appendix, the scoring framework and weightings will not be made available prior to the Open Call deadline

The weighted score for Appendix B of the application will be out of 57

The Total Score for this Call will be the combined score for the Part 2 in the application form plus the Appendix B score

STAGE 3. MODERATION

Funding from each Investment Priority will be awarded to the applicants with the highest score.

Where applications tie on scores, further moderation criteria will be applied as detailed in Stage 4, or applicants may be invited to discuss/negotiate their total project values.

In selecting projects, overall caps will be applied in line with the maximum total funding available for each Lot. This may result in applicants being invited to discuss/negotiate their total project values, their planned profiles of expenditure and outputs and outcomes, or the proportions of revenue and capital funding.

STAGE 4. FURTHER MODERATION (IF REQUIRED) AND SIGN OFF OF SUCCESSFUL APPLICATIONS

Based on the degree of moderation required to end up with a range of Grants which doesn't exceed the maximum funding available in this call, Nottinghamshire County Council, at its discretion, will agree an additional ranking or scoring framework (e.g. impact on Nottingham and Nottinghamshire's priority sectors).

NOTIFICATION OF INVITATION TO BID OUTCOME

Once the outcome of the assessment process has been notified to all applicants, organisations can request feedback on their applications and scoring.